

ARABELLA STUART,

A Romance.

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CHAPTER I.

THERE was a small, old-fashioned, red brick house, situated just upon the verge of Cambridgeshire, not in the least peculiar in its aspect, and yet deserving a description. The reader shall know why, before we have done. As you came along the road from London you descended a gentle hill, not very long, and yet long enough to form, with an opposite rise, one of those sweet, calm valleys which are peculiarly characteristic of the greater part of this country. When you were at the top of the hill, in looking down over some hedge-rows and green fields, the first thing your eye lighted upon in the bottom of the dale was a quick running stream, which seemed to have a peculiar art of catching the sunshine wherever it was to be found. Its course, though almost as rapid as if it had come down from a mountain,—having had, it is true, a pretty sharp descent about a mile to the westward,—was nevertheless, at this spot, directed through soft green meadows, and between flat and even banks. The water was of some depth also not less in general than from five to six feet, though not in most places above four or five yards in width. Where it crossed the road, however, there being no bridge, and the highway somewhat raised, it spread itself out into a good broad shallow stream, which, in the deepest part, only washed your horse's feet a little above the pastern.

Having carried it thus far, reader, we will leave it, without pursuing its course on towards the sea, which it reached

somehow, and somewhere, by ways and through channels with which we have nothing to do.

The eye of the traveller, however, on the London road in tracing this stream farther up, came upon a clump of tall old trees disencumbered of all brushwood, spreading wide at the top, but ungarnished by boughs or green leaves below, and affording habitation to a multitude of busy rooks, whose inharmonious voices—when joined together in full chorus, and heard from a distance—formed a peculiar kind of melody, connecting itself with many memories in the hearts of almost every one, and rousing soft and pensive imaginations from its intimate connection with those country scenes, and calm pleasures, amongst which must lie all man's sweetest associations. From the top of the hill on which we have placed ourselves, a number of chimney tops, somewhat quaint and fantastic in their forms, appeared to be actually rising from the very heart of the rookery; but if you stopped to let your horse drink at the stream in the bottom of the valley, and looked up its course to the left, you perceived that the house to which those chimneys belonged, lay at the distance of more than two hundred yards from the trees, and had a large garden with a long terrace, and a low wall between it and them.

The mansion was of no great extent, as we have already hinted, and might belong to a gentleman of limited means, though moving in the better ranks of life; the windows were principally of that peculiar form which was first introduced under the Tudors, as the pointed arch of a preceding epoch began to bow itself down towards the straight line in which it was extinguished not long after. The whole building might have risen from the ground somewhat more than half a century before the period of which we now speak, perhaps in the reign of Mary Tudor, perhaps in that of her brother Edward; and yet I will not take upon myself to say that the bloody and ferocious monster, their father, might not have seen it as he travelled down into Cambridgeshire. The colouring, indeed, was of that soiled and sombre hue, which bespoke long acquaintance with the weather; and though originally the glowing red bricks might have shown as rubicund a face as any newly-painted Dutch house at the side of a canal, they were now sobered down with age, and grey with the cankering hand of time. Although the garden was neatly kept, and somewhat prim, according to the fashion of the day, and a bowling-green just within the terrace was as trim and neatly shaved as if the scythe passed over it every morning,

nevertheless about the building itself were some signs and symptoms of decay, the work of neglect, rather than of time. Instead of neat and orderly pointing, the brickwork displayed, in various places, many an unstopped joint; and though, doubtless, weather-tight within, the stone coping was here and there broken, while one or two of the chimneys, which were gathered into groups of four set angularly, displayed the want of a brick in various places, which destroyed their fair proportions, without perhaps affecting their soundness.

It was in the year 1603, two hundred and forty years ago; reader, a long time for you and me to look back to, but yet the men and women of those days were the same creatures that we see moving round us at present, with this slight difference, that they had been less inured to restrain their passions, and conceal their feelings, than we are in a more polished and civilised state of society. Two hundred and forty years! What a lapse of time it seems; and yet to each of the many whose lives have filled up the intervening period, their own allotted portion, when they have looked back from the end of existence to the beginning, has seemed but a mere point—a moment out of the long eternity. To each, too, the changes which have taken place, and which to us in the aggregate appear vast and extraordinary, have been so slow and gradual, that he has scarcely perceived them, any more than we notice the alteration which fashion effects in our garments as we go on from year to year. Customs and manners, indeed, were very different in those days, though human beings were the same; but we must not stop to dwell upon minute particulars, or to detail forms and ceremonies, for it is not so much our object to depict the fashions and habits of that age, as to sketch a sad and extraordinary part of its history.

Between six and seven o'clock on an evening in the month of May, while the sky overhead was just beginning to be tinged with the hues of the declining sun, and the old trees of the rookery, covered with their young green leaves, looked almost autumnal in the various tints with which spring had decked them, a gentleman of fifty-eight or fifty-nine years of age walked slowly up and down upon the terrace which ran along before the building. He was upright in figure, well made though spare in form, rather below than above the middle height, calm and sedate in his step, thoughtful and perhaps sad in the expression of his countenance. His hair was quite white, soft, silky, and hanging, as was then customary, in curls upon his neck.

His eyebrows, which like his hair and beard were colourless, were somewhat bushy and arched. His mustachios were neatly trimmed, and his beard pointed, not very long, but yet not cut round, as was the fashion with the younger men of the day. He was dressed in black velvet, with shoes bearing large black rosettes, a small hat with a single feather, and had no ornament whatsoever about his person, unless the buttons of jet which studded his doublet, and the clasp of the same material which fastened his short cloak, deserved that name.

He was, indeed, altogether a very grave and serious-looking personage, with much mildness and benevolence as well as sagacity in his countenance; and yet there was a certain slight turn of the lip, an occasional twinkle of the eye, and a drawing up of the nostril, which seemed to indicate the slightest possible touch of a sarcastic spirit, which had, perhaps, at an earlier period been more unruly, though it was now chastened by the cares, the sorrows, the anxieties, and the experience of life.

He walked up and down, then, upon the terrace for some minutes, each time he turned, whether at the one end or the other, gazing down the course of the stream between the slopes of the hills towards the spot where the road from London crossed the valley, and then again bending his eyes upon the ground in meditation. Occasionally, however, he would look up to the sky, or down into the bowling-green; and, after one of the latter contemplations, he descended a flight of four stone steps which led down to the greensward, with the same calm and sedate step which had distinguished his promenade above; and taking up the large, round, wooden ball which lay on the grass, he held it in his hand for a moment, and then bowled it deliberately at a set of skittles which had remained standing at the other end of the green. The ball hit the pin at which it was aimed, which in its fall overthrew a number of others, while the gentleman whose hand had despatched the messenger of mischief on its errand, looked on with a grave smile. There was evidently something more in the expression of his countenance than mere amusement at seeing the heavy pieces of wood tumble over one another, and he murmured to himself as he turned away—

"Thus it is with human projects—ay, the best intended and most firmly founded; some accidental stroke overthrows one of our moral ninepins, and down go the whole nine!"

So saying, he returned to the terrace, and raising his voice, he cried, "Lakyn, Lakyn!" upon which a stout old

serving-man, with a badge upon his arm, came out unbanneted to receive his master's commands.

"Take away those ninepins, Lakyn," said the gentleman, "they have no business on the bowling-green; and put the bowls, too, under shelter. It will rain before morning."

"God bless your worship," replied the servant, looking up to the sky, "you are as weatherwise as a conjuror."

"Or a shepherd," replied the gentleman, resuming his walk; and the old man proceeded to gather up the implements of the good old game of our ancestors, muttering to himself, "Who would have thought it would rain before morning with such a sky as that. He knows more than other men, that's certain."

While he was busy with the bowls, his master's eye, glancing down again as before to the spot where the road and the stream met, rested on the figure of a single horseman coming from the direction of London.

"There, Lakyn, Lakyn!" he exclaimed; "run in, and never mind the bowls. Tell Sharpe to go round and take Mr. Seymour's horse at the garden gate. I will meet him there."

The old man hastened to obey, and, with his usual composed step, Sir Harry West—for such was the gentleman's name—proceeded from the terrace, through the garden which we have mentioned, to the angle next to the rookery, where he waited, leaning upon a little gate, till the horseman he had seen on the road arrived at the spot. At the same moment another old servant dressed in grey ran down panting, and doffing his bonnet to the stranger with lowly reverence, held the bridle while he dismounted.

The horseman then at a quick pace advanced to the gate, which was by this time open to receive him, and with a look of glad and well satisfied reverence kissed the hand of the master of the house. Sir Harry West, however, threw his arm around him affectionately, and gazed in his face, saying, "Welcome, my dear William, welcome! So you are back from Flanders at length. 'Tis eighteen months since I have seen you."

"'Tis a long time indeed, sir," replied the visitor; "but time has made no change in you, I am glad to see."

"It has in you, William," answered Sir Harry West; "a great change, but a good one—though why in our boyhood we should desire man's estate I know not. 'Tis but a step to the grave. However, you are a man now both in years and appearance, though you left me but a youth; and once more he gazed over the young gentleman's face and form, as we look at a country we have known in our

early years on returning after a long absence, tracing the changes that have been made therein, and sometimes perhaps regretting even the improvements.

The countenance and the form that he looked upon were not indeed ill calculated to bear inspection, being those of an English gentleman of about one or two and twenty years of age, and of the best class and character. Now there can be little doubt to any one who has travelled far and wide over distant lands, that the English people are, on the whole—with the exception, perhaps, of some small tribes in the Tyrol, and of one or two districts in Spain, where the Moorish blood has been mixed with the Gothic—the handsomest race that this quarter of the world called Europe can produce; and the young stranger was certainly not inferior to any of his countrymen in personal appearance. He was tall and evidently powerful in form, though some of the slightness of youth was still there, and all its graces. His hair was dark brown and curling in large waves, and his features were as fine as those of any of the faces that poet, painter, or sculptor have ever dreamed or portrayed.

There was, moreover, a peculiar expression in his countenance which struck the eye more than even the beauty of the lines. It was an expression of depth, of intensity, which sometimes may be seen in very ugly faces, but which is sure to give them a charm which nothing can take away. His manner, too, harmonized with the expression, and gave it force. Before he spoke, especially when, as in the present case, he was intimate with the person with whom he conversed, he paused for a single moment, looking at him thoughtfully, as if seeking the spirit within and addressing himself to it; so that it seemed that there was a communication established between himself and those he loved, distinct from that of speech.

These things, though they be slight, have a considerable influence on the intercourse of ordinary life; and as the sum of human existence is made up of small things, (the greater events being but the accidents,) all that affects their course has its importance.

Nor is dress, in general, altogether unworthy of attention. Somebody has called it the habitual expression of a man's mind; and, though I cannot agree to that definition in the full sense, yet, certainly, where there is no impediment to his following his own wishes, a man's dress affords strong indications of his tastes and habits of thought. That of William Seymour was not studied, but yet it was such as well became him; there was a certain degree of care-

lessness about the slashed doublet, of dark green cloth, showing the white satin with which it was lined here and there; but yet it fitted well. The cloak of the same colour, with its edging of gold, was thrown lightly on the shoulder, and the hat and plume not quite straight upon the head. As if fond of the same hues, no other colours were used in any part of his dress, even to the sheath of his sword and dagger, with the exception of the large riding boots of untanned leather, which were those commonly worn by all gentlemen in travelling. These of course bore their own russet hue, and displayed marks of a long ride. The rest of his dress also was somewhat dusty, for the day had been warm and dry; and the roads of England were in those times not of the same firm and solid consistence of which they may boast at present, so that the garments of the traveller were generally more powdered with sand in the summer, and more splashed with mud in the winter, though his horse might display less frequently a pair of broken knees, and his own head find a softer resting-place if he chanced to meet with a fall.

Of the conversation which ensued at the garden gate between Sir Harry West and William Seymour, I shall not stop to give the details. Suffice it that the words of the traveller merely evinced his satisfaction at seeing again one who had been the guide of his youth, under whom he had first tried his arms in Ireland against Tyrone, and who was, moreover, nearly related to him, being his mother's first cousin; while those of Sir Harry West displayed little less pleasure at seeing the boy whom he had educated in the way of honour, than if he had been his only child. Talking over the events of the last eighteen months, and mingling their conversation with many a reference to former years, they passed through the garden and over the terrace into the house.

There, over pleasant memories, amidst which there was but little to forget,—for even pains and anxieties, strifes and fatigues, which pass away, gain through the softening glass of memory a rosy hue, mellowed yet warm,—they enjoyed an hour of that sweet intercourse which can only be known to hearts conscious of high and upright purposes; for the things on which remembrance dare not rest, are only follies and vices. All accidental sorrows may be dwelt upon with calmness, or recollected with gratitude to him who sent them; the sorrows that spring from ourselves preserve their unmitigated bitterness. But here there were none such to recal; and, though they spoke of perils, and disasters, of the loss of friends well loved,

of bright expectations disappointed, and of aspirations for their country's good unfruitful, yet, in that old hall, no self-reproach mingled with the theme of their discourse; and it was pleasant and soothing both to the young man and the old.

There we will leave them for a certain time, to return to them ere long.

CHAPTER II.

THERE was a large fire blazing in the wide, open chimney of a little village inn, although it was, as we have said, the month of May, and the temperature during the day had been warm. Towards evening, however, it had grown colder, and small drops of rain had begun to descend, ending in a heavy shower as night fell. The fire, however, had not been piled up with the logs of which it was principally composed, altogether for the purpose of keeping out the chilly air of evening — though several of the neighbouring peasantry had taken advantage of the cheerful blaze to warm themselves while they drank their jug of ale; and mine host, with his fair white apron, took care to give them every encouragement to remain, and showed not the slightest disinclination to make as many journeys to the hogshead as his guests desired. His wife, however, and his daughter, both of whom were busily engaged in basting some provision, which turned upon two large spits before the crackling wood, seemed much less disposed to the society of the villagers, giving them many a hint that they interrupted them in the care of the capons, distracted their attention from the sirloin, and had well-nigh made them spoil “the dumplings and all” by letting the pot boil over. In the end, the elder dame, warm by nature, and heated still farther by the fire, gave one of the boors a push with her broad hand, which brought him from his stool to the floor, exclaiming,

“Get thee gone, Cobbler Hodge; ’tis time for thee to be home with thy wife. The gentry will be here anon, and we must have the place cumbered with the like of thee, must we!”

“Nay, nay, Maude,” said her husband, “the great people

ever say half-an-hour before they intend to come. Let the man remain, I tell thee; they won't be here for this hour."

"And we will stay till they come," cried Hodge, rising up, and resuming his seat a little farther from the fair virago of the inn. "We want to see who are these gentry that arrive so late at night. These are perilous times, Master Millpond, when the Queen is just dead, and the King's Majesty not arrived from the North."

"It may be the King himself, God bless his Grace!" said another of the boors; but even as he spoke, to prove the conjecture false, as well as the prognostications of the landlord, the sound of horses' feet, and persons speaking, was heard approaching the door; and, the moment after, a voice was added, calling loudly, in a tone of great authority, for host, ostlers, and horseboys.

The landlord rushed out with all speed; his wife abused her humble neighbours in no very gentle and tender terms; the peasants themselves drew back in awe, the greater because the object of it was undefined; and, after a few moments of confusion, clatter, and talking without, mine host reappeared, bowing to the ground, as he ushered in his guests.

The first who entered—nearly a minute before any of the rest—was certainly not the sort of being the persons assembled within expected to see, for the door only gave admission to a beautiful girl of some nineteen or twenty years of age, with her rich, clustering hair, wet with rain, falling from its bands about her face and shoulders, and with a look of laughing, yet half-rueful, satisfaction on her face as she turned to one of those behind, saying in a sweet, though jesting tone,

"Good faith, my friend, if thou art as wet as I am, the lowliness of the roof will not mar your joy in taking shelter under it."

"Lord love you, sweet lady!" cried the hostess, advancing. "Well, you are wet indeed! What a night for such a beautiful lady as you to be out in. Why, all the rich velvet and the gold lace is spoiled. Heart of grace! and your yellow riding-coat is all draggled with mud above your knees!"

"Ay! good truth," replied the lady, advancing toward the fire, "it is so, indeed, dame. Forty sterling marks cast away upon a miserable shower of rain, and a weary ride from Walden. But here seems the comfort of plentiful food, and a good fire to dry one."

"Oh, yes, lady; oh, yes," replied the hostess, "everything is quite ready; let me take out that buckle, lady.—

Get you home to your beds, fellows! what do you stand staring at there, as if you never saw a young gentlewoman before?—It's all because you're so beautiful, ma'am, that puts them out of their manners. 'Tisn't every day they see a skin like that, I trow."

The lady tossed her head with a gay laugh.

"I thought such words were the coin of courts," she said, "not current in the country; but I am overburdened with such small change, good dame, so tell me no more of my beauty, and do not drive these good people from the fire, where they have as much right as I have. Now, Maltby and Adams, bring in all the bags here, or they will soon be as wet as we are; and do not let the girl Marian stay out there all night to look after goods and chattels which will not melt as easily as herself, I warrant. We must stay here this night, that's clear. Why, what's the matter, Marian: you seemed scared?"

The girl whom she addressed, and who was evidently the maid of a person of quality, ran up to her mistress with somewhat frightened and mysterious looks, whispering something in her ear; while the hostess, on the other side, assailed her with assurances that everything was quite right and prepared "for her bedchamber, and guest-chamber, and all," muttering between whiles to herself, "Stay here?—To be sure! Marry, when all is made ready, why should she not?"

The lady might be somewhat embarrassed by the discourses of the two who addressed her at once; but, nevertheless, she seemed to catch the words of each, and replied to both.

"Four men?" she said, speaking to the maid. "Well, what of that, girl? They will do thee no harm, though they be on horseback. You say, my good dame, that all is made ready for me; but, in good truth, I fear there is some mistake, which, I trust, may not deprive me of my supper and a lodging. I intended to have gone farther to-night,—perhaps to Royston; and it was the rain that drove me hither. Mayhap thy good things are made ready for some other person."


"For me, madam," said a gentleman, advancing from the door, the threshold of which he had crossed the moment before. "But, right happy am I," he added, "that what was prepared for me may be used by you, whom all men are bound to honour and obey."

The lady had turned, with some surprise, at first sound of the speaker's voice, and, certainly, his words did not diminish her astonishment. He was a tall, thin, bony man,

dark in complexion, somewhat sharp in features, with a cold, calm, steady eye, but a bland and a pleasant smile about the mouth. He was dressed in the style of a military man of some rank, and affected the bushy beard and long mustachios of the swaggering adventurers of the day. Nothing else, however, in his appearance or manner indicated that he belonged to that somewhat disagreeable and dangerous race of animals. But no line or feature in his face called up any recollection of him in the lady's mind; and, after a momentary pause to consider his countenance, she replied, "You seem to know me, sir, and yet may be mistaken. I am a very humble person, whom no one is bound to obey that I know of, but my good girl, Marian, here, and one or two trusty servants, who find the bond more in their affection than their duty."

"The Lady Arabella Stuart," answered the stranger, "is not to be mistaken; and surely one so near the crown of England may well command our duty."

"I am the King's most humble subject, though his kinswoman, sir," replied the Lady Arabella, coldly; for, young as she was, she had already been the object of ambitious designs on the part of some, and needless jealousy on the part of others. "I claim no duty from any one but my own people, and would fain make that as light as may be."

"Your ladyship is wise and right," said the stranger; "and love makes duty light to all men. What I would say is, madam, I rejoice that I yesterday commanded preparations in this poor inn, as all is ready for you, which it might not otherwise have done. Come, dame hostess, show the lady to a chamber where she may change her dress; and, in the meantime, good master, serve the supper, to be ready when she returns. Have you the vacant room prepared which I ordered? With her permission, I will be the Lady Arabella's humble carver." 

The lady bowed her head, gave a quick glance round three or four other faces, which were now gathered together at the farther side of the room, and, accompanied by her maid, retired, with the landlady's daughter lighting her, and one of the two men-servants carrying a pair of ponderous leathern bags, such as were then commonly used for conveying the various articles of dress which a traveller might need upon his journey.

As soon as she was gone, the gentleman who had been speaking to her, turned to three other personages, who seemed to have arrived in his company, and held a low and earnest conversation with them for some minutes. The

landlord's ears were sharp, and he had his own share of shrewdness; but although he manœuvred skilfully to come nearer to the strangers, and used his facility of hearing to the utmost, he could only catch two or three words.

One said, somewhat louder than the rest, "'Tis most fortunate;" another, "We should have passed them in the night and missed our mark. Good luck to the rain!"

The landlord could gather no more; and seeing the eye of the principal visitor upon him, he thought it best to apply himself seriously to carry in the supper into an adjoining chamber, which had been prepared according to directions received beforehand. When he returned from his first expedition with trenchers and drinking-cups, he found the stranger, who seemed the leader of the rest, standing before the fire, while the villagers, who had lingered till they received a very sharp and definite hint from the landlady, were no longer apparent.

As soon as the landlord came in, his guest made a slight and scarcely perceptible motion across his breast. The host instantly crossed himself, bowing his head low, and from that moment a sort of confidential intercourse was established between him and the stranger, which made them both understand each other perfectly, without a word of explanation being spoken.

In the meanwhile the lady had been shown into a room, low in the roof, with the large dark rafters protruding from the ceiling. It contained two beds, a small mirror, not much larger than one's hand, a table, some chairs, and a large brazen sconce against the wall, with lamps not lighted. While the serving-man laid the large leathern bags across a stool, and the landlady's daughter bustled about in setting things to rights, Arabella Stuart, seated before the table, had fallen into a deep reverie.

We must look into her thoughts: for she spoke not, though she was carrying on an argument with herself.

"I know not his face," she said: "I know not his face, and yet I must doubt the man—and that other face over his shoulder? Methinks I have seen it before—can it have been with the Jesuit, Parsons?—else why did it bring up that wicked, cunning man to my mind, who would fain have entangled me in things for my destruction? Well, well, I will treat it lightly—ay, lightly. The shaft that may hit the heavy-flying crow misses the light-winged swallow. Yet I will be upon my guard; and if I find new plotters, I will not house with them through the night—I will no plots, not I. If they will but let me live my little life in peace, and die with an innocent spirit, I ask no more.

Marian, girl!" she added, aloud, and then whispered to the maid for a moment, who instantly quitted the room.

"Come hither, pretty maiden," continued the lady, addressing the landlord's daughter, "and help me to put off this dress. It seems a fair country this round your village, as well as I could judge through the rain. Now, there is many a gentleman's house in the neighbourhood, I'll warrant."

"Good heart, no," replied the girl; "we are but poorly off in such commodities."

"Why, faith, I thought I saw several large houses as I came along," rejoined the lady. "Who's was that large mansion on the top of the hill, about a mile hence?"

The girl laughed. "That's the great black barn," she said. "It does look like a castle by night, with the trees round it. No, madam: the only large house we have near is Sir Harry West's."

"I must have passed it as I came," answered the lady. "Undo this knot, good girl. I know Sir Harry West well. He showed himself a gallant gentleman in the Irish wars, though as mild as he is brave. Which was his house?"

"If you are journeying from London," said the girl, "you passed it two miles hence, on the left up the valley, by the side of the stream. But I doubt if you could see it by night."

The lady made no reply, and the moment after her maid re-entered the room, and took the place of the landlady's daughter in assisting the Lady Arabella at her toilet. The dress was soon changed—at least as far as she would suffer it to be; for the long riding-skirt, in which she had come thither, she retained over her other garments, though it was soiled, and somewhat wet. In this plight, however, she returned to the kitchen of the inn, where she found the strange cavalier ready to receive her, and was by him led, with courtier-like formality, into an adjoining chamber, where a table was placed, groaning under the abundant supper which had been prepared. But only one cover was laid upon the board, apparently intended for herself. To this place the stranger conducted her, and seemed literally about to take upon himself the office of carver, as he had proposed; but Arabella paused, without sitting down, saying,

"Nay, my good sir, I should surely be wanting in courtesy to let you stand and carve, while I, like the wild beast, which loves to feast without company, devour your supper. You have more gentlemen, too, I think, with you

—though I know neither their name nor yours, to ask you to be seated."

"Oh, my followers, madam, will find supper without," replied the stranger; "and as to my name, lady, I am called the Baron de Mardyke—a foreign name, as you will see, but having been born in England, in King Edward's time, I am more than half an Englishman."

"Pray, then, be seated," said the Lady Arabella; and the stranger, drawing a stool to the table, did as she bade him.

Before he took his place, however, he crossed himself reverently, in rather an ostentatious manner, very different from that which he had used in making the same sign before the landlord. The lady could not help noticing the gesture; but she took no notice, and, after a brief grace murmured to herself, sat down at table.

The gentleman, as in duty bound, carved for her; and, as she made no observation, the meal was silent for several minutes, while the landlord and one of the stranger's servants came in and out, and caused a bustle amongst the plates and trenchers.

"In Spain," said the stranger, breaking silence, with a smile, "the host of an inn so near the capital as this, would have been ashamed to send up capons of last year to a lady's table."

"You have been in Spain, then," said the Lady Arabella. "It is a fair country, is it not?—rich in song and romance?"

"Rich in everything," replied the Baron; "beautiful to the eye, delicious in climate, full of splendid cities and courteous gentlemen—a land of princes, lady."

"Good truth, then, it must be but a dull place," exclaimed Arabella, with a gay laugh. "I have seen some princes since my birth, and I must say that they are the dullest specimens of mortal man I ever met with."

"You have known few Spanish princes, madam," said her companion, "or you would judge differently."

"No," answered the lady; "the only one I ever met with, who bore his dignity with modesty, and elevated it by grace, was a German."

"True," rejoined the Baron; "some of the Royal and Electoral Houses have produced men not easily to be banished from a lady's memory—or her heart."

"Nay," said Arabella, with a careless smile, "my little heart is all too narrow to take in so great a thing as a prince."

Her companion cast a quick glance around the room to

see that no one was near, and then replied in a low but emphatic tone, "I hope not—I hope not."

The blood came up into the lady's cheek, and after gazing in his face for an instant, she cast down her eyes again, and remained silent. Several of the dishes were removed, now others put upon the table; and then, as if accidentally, both the landlord and the serving-man quitted the room.

"How strange are the events of life!" said the Baron de Mardyke.

"They are indeed," answered the Lady Arabella, "almost as strange as man's own heart."

"Here was I," continued her companion, not appearing to heed her words, "riding on an errand of much importance to visit a fair and noble lady, whom I should have missed seeing till it was too late, had it not been for a shower of rain."

"If you mean me, sir," said the fair girl beside him, "you must have made some mistake in your errand; for I am a being of so little consequence myself that nothing of importance can have reference to me."

"You may in a few weeks be of much more," replied the Baron.

"Nay, heaven forbid!" cried Arabella, resuming the gay and jesting tone which she had laid aside for a moment. "I can conceive no fate more perverse than that which would make me of any consequence at all. I never knew a bird that cared, so that his wings were tied, whether the threads that tied them were golden or hempen. Greatness is a snare from which one never escapes, once having fallen into it. But, good truth, I am curious who you can be, sir," she continued, stopping him as he was about to speak; "I am shrewd at divining; but yet men take such disguises now-a-days, a poor woman can hardly discover them. Nay, tell me not, tell me not! I love to puzzle out a mystery, and I would fain guess for myself who and what you may be."

"Who think you, madam?" asked the stranger.

"Baron de Mardyke!" said Arabella, thoughtfully; "that may be some assumed title of a great man who would fain appear less than he is,—you may be one of those Spanish princes you talk of."

"Or his envoy," answered the other.

"Hush, hush!" cried the lady, in the same tone of raillery, "let me see,—Baron de Mardyke! That, on the contrary, may be a name taken by some lesser man who wishes to seem greater than he is,—you may be a Jesuit in

disguise, a disciple of Loyola, or Lainez," and she looked keenly at him as she spoke.

There was a slight contraction of the lips, and a passing shade upon the brow of the gentleman whom she addressed; but he replied in an unaltered tone, "You will guess right ere long, madam; for when you have exhausted conjecture, you will come back to simple truth, and leave the Baron de Mardyke just what he was before. — But ere we are interrupted, let me say that I have matter of much importance for your private ear after this meal be over, — secrets of great moment!"

"Trust them not to me, then!" cried the young lady, "for I have a strange habit of dropping jewels by the way. I never could keep anything that was precious in my life— 'tis but yesterday I lost a diamond; and as for secrets, I am so conscious of my carelessness, that I always give them to the next person I meet with, being quite sure that any one will preserve them better than myself."

The stranger bit his lip; but the host entering at the moment after, stopped him in his reply. When the supper was over, however, he kept his eyes fixed upon the lady, while the host and the servant were clearing away all that encumbered the table: and it was evident that he was waiting impatiently for them to be gone. But just as the landlord was about to retire, Arabella addressed him in a quiet tone, saying, "Send my girl Marian hither, mine host; I wish to speak with her."

The Baron made him a quick and scarcely perceptible sign; and by some accident the landlord quite forgot to obey the lady's behest, taking the opportunity of scolding his daughter for something that had gone amiss, and then aiding the rest of the party who were assembled in the kitchen to consume the remains of the supper which he had brought out of the neighbouring room.

In that chamber the Lady Arabella and the Baron de Mardyke, as we must call him for the time, remained for nearly twenty minutes, while the host and the Baron's followers talked loud, and passed many a joke and many a cup of good strong ale round the table. The girl Marian and one of the Lady Arabella's servants were seated with the rest: but the other serving-man had remained at the stable, tending the horses. At the end of the time we have mentioned, however, he made his appearance again: and the voices of the horse-boys of the inn were heard without the door. Marian started up as soon as she saw him; and the man, who was a ~~black~~ English servant of some forty-five or fifty years of age, walked straight up to

the chamber where his mistress was, and opening the door, said aloud, "The horses are waiting, lady!"

The cheek of Lady Arabella Stuart was somewhat flushed, and her face grave; but she instantly resumed her sweet and playful smile, while her companion exclaimed, "You surely are not going on, in such a night as this, madam?"

"As surely as I live," replied the lady; "you know, good sir, I could not plunder you of your lodging as well as your supper; and so I will even wish you a fair good night, and take my leave, besecching you to bear in mind what I have said, as on that score I change not, and it may be well to be careful. I thank you for your courtesy, she continued, "though, if I had known one part of my entertainment here, I should have found shelter elsewhere."

Thus saying, she adjusted her head-gear, while moving across the kitchen towards the door of the inn; and, taking a piece of gold from a silken purse which she carried in her bosom, she gave it to the host, saying, "That's for your fee, my friend; but remember, another time when I tell you to send my woman to me, do as you are directed."

The host made a thousand apologies, laying the blame upon a bad memory; and the Lady Arabella, without heeding him, issued forth into the night with her servants following, the landlady and her daughter curtsying, and the host holding a lantern snatched up in haste.

In the meantime, the personage who had borne her company at supper, was surrounded by his three companions, asking him questions in a low, but rapid voice.

"She is a fool," he replied, "and yet not a fool either,—keen enough as to what concerns her not, but blind to her own interest. She casts away a crown," he added, in a lower tone, "as a child does a long-used plaything."

"Will she betray us?" asked one of his companions.

"I think not," replied the other.

"Think not?" said a third, "we had better make sure of that!" But, at the same moment, the sound of horses' feet trotting away was heard; and the landlord and his family came back from the door.

CHAPTER III.

THE old hall was warm and comfortable; the great, wide, open hearth displayed some half-dozen logs of blazing wood; and the fitful flame of the fire, outshining the two candles that stood upon the table, flickered round the whole room, glancing upon the quaint old carvings that surrounded the panels, prying into the deep bays of the windows, and catching here and there upon some well-polished casque, breastplate, or other piece of ancient armour, which, suspended by hooks and brackets, ornamented the walls. The ceiling, which was of old oak, like the wainscot, was lost in the obscurity above; but the rich mantelpiece was fully seen by the light of the candles near it, and was the pride of the room and that part of the country. It had been carved by a famous Flemish artist, and presented by him to good Sir Harry West for some kindly service rendered during the time of the Low Country wars. What was the deed that merited the gift we do not, indeed, know; but it is probable that the oaken sculpture had some reference to the cause of the sculptor's gratitude, as on either side of the chimney stood the figure of an armed knight, in full relief, bearing upon his shoulder a corner of the entablature, on which was represented, in a smaller size, the history of the good Samaritan.

Before the fire-place, at a convenient distance, stood a round table, covered with the relics of the evening-meal. Drinking-cups are there, and flagons, and it would seem that in that squat, flat-sided, long-necked bottle, there is some precious and much-esteemed liquor, from the tall *glasses, gilt and bedizened*, which stand by, and can never be destined for the conveyance of any unworthy fluid. Between the table and the fire, so near the former that the elbow could rest comfortably upon it, sat the good knight the master of the house, and his young kinsman; and between them, again, and the chimney, lay a large, shaggy hound, such as would have delighted the soul of a Landseer, or a Scott, and who may have been a remote connection of one of those immortalised by Rubens. Stretched out like a trussed hare, with his paws before him, and his

long muzzle gracefully leaning over the ankle next to the fire, the good dog seemed to be asleep; and, perhaps, had his head been in a position to accomplish such a feat, he might have nodded from time to time; but, nevertheless, he was evidently only in a state of pleasant drowsiness, for ever and anon he opened his keen eyes, and gazed into the fire, as if wondering what that extraordinary element could be, and twice lifted up his head, and looked in his master's face, to see that all was right, speedily settling himself down to his doze again.

It is a sweet and pleasant thing for two old, familiar friends to spend together a long hour after the sun has gone down, and when all the world is quiet, in a warm room, with a blazing fire, and with the moderate use of the pure juice of the grape to fill the intervals of conversation. No haste is upon them, no hurry, no hateful pressure of importunate business; there they can sit as long as they choose; it matters not whether they rise the next minute, or three hours hence. They are free—in short, free from the bondage of worldly affairs, and can do what they think fit with their little treasure of time. No liberty is more pleasant than the emancipation from all the chains, and shackles, and bars, and bonds of business; and there, when Memory, sweet Memory, takes us by the hand, and leads us back into the flower-garden of other years, and points out all the blossoming things that we loved, looking as fresh and beautiful as ever, how sweet are the sensations, how entrancing would they be, were it not for the subdued consciousness that it is all a part of the dream that is passing away!

Nor is the pleasure of such intercourse lessened when there exists some difference in age between the two companions. Youth brings its eager fancy, its bright expectations, its energetic rashness, to the mithridate; and Age its sober reason, its bright remembrances, its calm knowledge, and its tried powers. The party must never extend beyond two, however; a dog, indeed, you may admit, a friendly, faithful dog, the image of unbought attachment and unvarying love; but there must be no one else.

Thus had Sir Harry West and his young friend been passing the last hour—now turning their thoughts to the days when William Seymour was a mere boy, and, as the second son of a noble family, had been left greatly to the care of his maternal relations; now talking of those days of strange adventure, when, under the guardianship of the good knight, he had first mounted horse for the battle-field in that beautiful neighbouring island to which England has

been "little more than kin, and less than kind"—when about half-past nine o'clock, which was, indeed, half an hour later than Sir Harry West's usual bed-time in the country, the dog, who lay upon the hearth, gave signs of being awake by raising one ear perpendicularly from his head, without, however, moving from his place, or lifting his muzzle from his paw.

"He hears some sound without," observed his master, whose eyes had been fixed contemplative upon him.

"And yet," said William Seymour, who understood that he spoke of the dog, for he had been looking in the same direction, without any visible cause for his eyes being turned towards the animal, except that those of his friend were resting upon it, "and yet the rain is dropping so hard and heavily that I should suppose no sound from without but a very loud one, would drown its noise and the crackling of the fire, for ears that lie so near the blaze as his."

"They are quicker than our own even in youth," replied his friend; "it is wonderful how dogs will catch the lightest sound, and distinguish in a moment whether it is one they are accustomed to or not. They are learned in sounds, these triangular-headed gentry. Sec! he looks up; if it were a moonlight night, I should think some of the young neighbouring vagabonds had come to plunder the rookery or the dovecot."

As he spoke, the dog gazed in his master's face for a moment, as if for encouragement, and then gave a short growl.

"What is the matter, Mark'em?" asked the old knight, patting his head; and instantly the dog sprang forward into one of the bay-windows, with a loud, angry bark, which was repeated more fiercely still the next moment, when a thundering heavy blow upon the door of the house announced that some visitor sought admission.

"Down, Mark'em!—down!" cried Sir Harry West. "On my life, this is a stormy night for any one to venture out. Those blue-bottles of mine must not keep the man waiting, whoever he be;" and, advancing to the door of the room, he called loudly to several of the servants by name.

Before they could come, however, he himself had crossed to the hall-door, and opened it, saying, "Come in, whoever you are!—What is it you want, good fellow? I know your face. Whose servant are you?"

"The Lady Arabella's, Sir Harry," replied the man; "but we want help quickly. Her horse has fallen in this

dark night; and, though she says she is not hurt, yet we all fear it is but to give us comfort."

"Bring lanterns! bring lanterns!" cried Sir Harry, vehemently. "Lakyn! Matthew! Dick! Here, William Seymour, come with me. Here is that dear, beautiful girl, with her horse down, and herself hurt. Patience and mercy! what made her ride out in such a night as this?"

But William Seymour was by this time at the hall-door.

"I will go, I will go!" he exclaimed. "Stay you, Sir Harry. Send down the lanterns. I will go."

And, without waiting to catch up cloak or hat, he ran out over the terrace and through the garden, passed the little gate, and hurried on down the narrow road which kept along the stream. He had not far to go, however; for about half way between the house and the London road, he came suddenly upon a group of three human beings and five horses standing together, with the rain pouring down upon them in as heavy a stream as our somewhat weeping and uncertain skies ever let flow upon a hapless traveller.

"Are you hurt?—are you hurt?"—exclaimed the young gentleman, addressing the taller of the two women who formed parts of the group.

"No, indeed," replied the lady; "very little, if at all. I know your voice, sir, though I see you are not my old friend, Sir Harry West. Good heaven! can it be Mr. Seymour?"

"The same, lady, and ever the humblest of your servants," replied the young gentleman. "Pray, let me assist you to the house. There are people coming with lanterns directly. Let me support you."

Arabella gave him her hand without any sign of unwillingness; and he led her on with care, asking again, in a low voice, as soon as they were some ten or twenty steps from her attendants, "Are you hurt?"

The question was put in one of those tones that give peculiar value and meaning to words, otherwise of no import,—those tones that may be called a second language, an universal tongue, in which all the comments of the heart are written upon the colder and more abstruse dialect in which we carry on our conversation with the ordinary world. He had asked her before the same question, and received an answer. What was it, then, he now said? A vast deal more, though without using any other than the words he had first employed. He told her, then, with the thrilling anxiety of deep interest, that he feared she was more hurt than she would allow; that he was alarmed,

grieved, pained, by what had happened ; that he was rejoiced to see her again ; that the lightest injury to her was of deep importance to him. Yes, although he only used those few words, that brief question, like Lord Burleigh's famous shake of the head, meant all this. Luckily, it so happens that there is no instruction required to learn the language of which we speak ; the key to the cipher is in the hearts of every one, but more especially in the breast of woman ; and Arabella, whatever were her own feelings, easily translated the tone of William Seymour into express terms.* Not that he had ever said one word to her which the most distant acquaintance might not justify ; not that one phrase had ever passed between them which the ear of the whole world might not have heard, but he had often spoken as he now spoke, and the tones had often made her heart thrill. She was, however, accustomed to inspire interest and excite admiration ; she could not but know it ; and, though in many cases she cared little about it, perhaps William Seymour's was not the instance in which she valued it the least.

Arabella Stuart fancied herself in no degree ambitious. She had seen princes at her feet, without estimating them in the least by the crowns they offered, or the territories they possessed. She had willingly seen the proposals of some of the highest men in Europe rejected by those who ruled her fate ; and yet she was perhaps the most ambitious person that it is possible to conceive ; for she sought to obtain that which is the most difficult for any human being to gain—especially of royal blood. The object of her ambition was happiness ! that glorious crown which all the jewels of the world cannot enrich, which, studded with the diamonds of the heart, can receive no additional lustre from such paltry things as power, or wealth, or station.

In reply, she assured her companion that she was not hurt, and in her tone she thanked him much more than by mere words. She even let him know in some degree that she understood the interest he felt towards her, and was grateful to him for it.

Not much time, however, was allowed them for conversation of any kind ; for ere they had proceeded a hundred yards they were met by Sir Harry West, with his servants bearing lanterns ; and the good knight, with William Seymour, accompanied her back to the house, while the attendants went on to give assistance to the party left behind.

The same question, which she had already answered, was of course addressed to Arabella by her old friend, and he, too, showed almost as deep an interest as his companion.

had displayed, though it was of a different sort. Satisfied on that head, he put a number of other inquiries to her: whence she last came—whither she was going—how she happened to be riding forth at such a time of night, especially as it had been raining hard for several hours.

"Nay, nay, Sir Harry," cried the lady, gaily; "this is a catechism, and I will not answer you on all these heads now. You shall give me lodging in your castle for the night, if you be a gallant gentleman and true; and when I have once more cast off my wet garments, I will come and reply to all interrogatories as faithfully and discreetly as if I were before the Star Chamber."

"So shall it be, dear lady; so shall it be," replied Sir Harry West. "My good old housekeeper, Dame Cicely, has been called out of the still-room to tend upon you; and, thanks to this young gentleman's arrival this afternoon, the best chamber is ready prepared for your reception."

The lady, of course, said something apologetic for the trouble that she gave. "She was sorry, too," she said, "to deprive Mr. Seymour of his chamber." But the young gentleman assured her that he would sleep more sweetly for knowing that she was lodged in safety and in comfort; and Sir Harry answered, laughingly, that he had taught the boy, in years long past, to put up with hard beds and scanty lodging.

Thus talking, they soon reached the house, where a good matronly old woman, in a long stiff bodice, serge petticoat, and flowered gown, whose years would have had to roll back again some way to reach the age of sixty, accompanied by a handmaiden, who prided herself upon being at least five years younger than Dame Cicely, were waiting in the hall to give whatever help and tendance might be needed by the Lady Arabella. To their hands her two male companions consigned her, and then returned into the chamber where they had been passing the evening, when their conversation had been interrupted by the events which we have described. Without sitting down, both took their places before the fire again; and William Seymour brushed the wet with his hand from the curls of his hair, murmuring to himself,

"I trust she will not suffer from this."

"It is, indeed, a terrible night," said his old friend, "for such frail creatures as womankind to be out. There is nothing, William, that I thank God for more, amongst all the blessings he has showered upon me, than for not making me a woman."

"And yet, my dear sir," replied William Seymour, "you were always a most devoted admirer and humble servant of the fair."

"At a respectful distance, William, at a respectful distance," said the old knight, smiling. "When I was your age, it is true, I had some impulses of matrimony upon me, which, like other diseases of children, by a strong constitution and good management, I got over easily."

"Nay," cried William Seymour, "surely you do not call love a disease."

"Just as much the disease of youth," answered Sir Harry, with that slight touch of sarcasm in his look, which we have already noticed — "just as much a disease of youth as measles, or chin-cough, or mumps amongst children, or the distemper amongst dogs. True, it sometimes attacks us in mature age, and even in later life; but the cases are rare, and then it goes hard with the patient. Take care of thyself, my dear boy. Thou art just about the age to catch it; but if ever you do, come to me, and I will be your physician. Ha! Lakyn. Bring them in, bring them in! Show that pretty maiden to her mistress's chamber. Is the horse much hurt?"

"Both his knees as full of holes as a beggar's coat, Sir Harry," replied the old man.

"That is bad, that is bad," said Sir Harry West. "Have them well bathed with hot water, Lakyn; then take a gill of Bordeaux wine, an ounce of salt, and a little sweet oil to anoint them with."

"I know, I know, Sir Harry," answered the man. "'Tis a marvellous receipt; but this horse is a mighty deal worse than the grey gelding."

Thus saying he withdrew, taking with him to the buttery the two servants of the Lady Arabella, with the hospitable design of comforting each with a cup of humming ale; and the conversation was renewed between Sir Harry West and his young friend, much in the same strain as before, till the lady herself made her appearance in the old hall.

She was somewhat paler than usual, and her step had less of its buoyant lightness, as she was led by her good host with ceremonious respect to a chair by the fire. She owned, too, that she felt somewhat bruised with her fall, and expressed her determination soon to retire to rest.

"I am afraid, Sir Harry," she said, "that I cannot say my catechism to-night; but, to satisfy you on one head before I go, I will tell you the cause of my journey. The King, you know, is already on his way from Scotland, and

has crossed the border, I understand, some days. 'Twas only yesterday, however, that my aunt of Shrewsbury gave me notice that such was the case, and urged me strongly, by her letters, to hasten to meet his Majesty, my royal cousin, and offer him my loyal duty. As she knew I was but poorly attended, she told me that some ten of her own people should meet me at Stamford, if I would come thither with all speed. Thus, you see, I set out but with two men and my girl Marian; and, as the day was fine, I hoped to have a moonlight ride for an hour or two during the night."

"I fear, dear lady," answered the knight, "that the good Countess has led you to a needless, as well as unlucky, journey. She does not seem to know that the King has issued a proclamation, forbidding all persons resort to the court during its progress towards London. It were wise of you, ere you proceed, to send a messenger to his Majesty, asking permission to wait upon him."

"Nay," exclaimed the Lady Arabella, "surely he will not refuse to receive his poor kinswoman?"

"Dear lady," replied her old counsellor, "you surely should know something of royal personages; and yet, methinks, you are ignorant of how small a thing with them may turn love into disliking. A light word spoken, an act of deference forgotten, the slightest disobedience, even when it springs from affection, may deprive one of favour, and never be forgiven. No after devotion, no penitence will wipe away the impression; and dark looks and a cloudy brow, whenever you appear, will be all that you can expect for life."

"Oh!" cried Arabella, "how differently would I act if I were a queen! Love should to me stand in place of duty, truth should well supply respect, honour should be the courtesy that I would prize, and merit have its reward, not fawning. I would be bountiful,—not only in deeds, but in words and looks,—would break no promise that I made, and never inflict upon hope the agony of delay. When I refused, it should be with gentleness; when I gave, it should be at once. I should be loath to punish, punishing my own heart at the same time. I would be careful of my lightest word, knowing that no words are light upon a monarch's lips."

"I am sure you would," exclaimed William Seymour, in a tone that made Arabella raise her eyes to his face, with a slight increase of colour in her cheek.

But good Sir Harry West did not seem to enter into the enthusiasm of his young friend.

"You would be a very sweet lady, then," he said, "but

perhaps not a good queen. Royalty is a rough thing, lady; it has to deal with hard matters, and must be somewhat hard itself. True, sovereigns often think that they are exempt from the milder duties of mankind, and in that are wrong; for they require more qualities than other men, not less. They should want no kindly affections of the heart, but have the greater strength to rule them, from the greater need. The acts of ordinary men affect but a narrow circle; the acts of sovereigns spread round to every human being throughout their whole dominions. An individual may make any sacrifice he pleases of that which is his own property, without injuring any one; a monarch is the property of his people, and can make no sacrifice without affecting all. Stern facts, lady, stern facts; but no less true than stern."

"Thank God I am not a queen!" said Arabella, after a moment's pause. "But, to return," she continued; "what would you have me do, Sir Harry, in this business with the King? He may take offence if I go not forward to meet him, and think me wanting in duty; and, as you say, if I do approach the court, after the proclamation, I may be held as disobedient. What shall I do? I will be guided by your advice."

"Stay here, dear lady," replied Sir Harry West, "and send a messenger to ask permission of the King. You will thus show both obedience and duty. Here is our young friend, William Seymour, doubtless he will willingly perform your behest, and be back in a day or two."

William Seymour, however, did not look so well satisfied as the old knight expected; and Arabella Stuart paused for a few moments without reply, as if not quite willing to take advantage at once of the proposal.

"I could scarcely venture to ask Mr. Seymour," she said, at length, raising her soft eyes to his face; "and perhaps he may not be inclined to go."

William Seymour could not find in his heart so far to belie his own feelings as to say he was willing, and yet he dared not explain what those feelings were. Perhaps Arabella was not willing to send him; but of that we know nothing, although, if she was very anxious that he should be her messenger, she did not quite display a woman's skill in carrying her point. On the contrary, indeed, she was the first to furnish him with a fair excuse for declining the commission.

"On second thoughts," she continued, after the young gentleman had made a somewhat hesitating tender of his services,— "on second thoughts, I must not even ask Mr.

‘ Seymour ; for, if disobedience to the proclamation might bring the King’s anger upon me, the same act would, of course, affect him in the like manner. There is the royal blood,” she added, with a smile, “ flowing in his veins as well as mine ; and, of course, our sovereign’s indignation would fall more heavily upon a man than upon a poor girl like me.”

‘ “ True,” said the old man, “ true ; I had forgotten that ; you must send some inferior person, lady. If you will write a letter to his Majesty to-night, I will despatch it by a messenger to-morrow, who shall put into the hands of Sir Robert Cecil, to be laid before the King ”

‘ “ I will do it at once,” replied Arabella, “ and then hie me to my bed ; for, to speak truth, I am somewhat weary with my journey, with the rain, and with my fall.”

‘ The letter was accordingly written in all due form, beseeching the King to suffer his poor cousin to pay her duty to him, by meeting him on the road to London : and on the following morning, before Arabella had left her bed, a trusty messenger was bearing it towards the north.

‘ Whether the fair writer slept well that night matters not to our history ; William Seymour scarcely closed an eye, and for two long hours after he had sought his chamber, he sat almost in the same attitude, with his head resting on his hand, in deep thought. As his meditation ended, he murmured a few words to himself. “ Now or never,” he said. “ Oh ! golden opportunity ! I will not suffer doubt or dismay to snatch thee from me ! ”

CHAPTER IV.

‘ **ALTHOUGH** duty and propriety, and a number of other considerations, should lead us to follow the messenger of Sir Harry West to the busy and bustling scene which was taking place at Newark-upon-Trent, on the occasion of King James’s entrance into that very respectable city, yet, yielding to temptation like other men, we feel ourselves so well pleased in the company of Arabella Stuart and William Seymour in the old knight’s house, that we cannot resist our inclination to remain a little longer with them, and to shun the noise and hurry of the court.

Oh, how sweetly, when we think of all that noise and hurry, do the calm and tranquil scenes of the country come upon the heart!—the sunshine slumbering upon the green field, the waving branches of the old trees, the free and dancing brightness of the rapid stream, the whispering of the soft-breathed wind, the singing of the joyous birds, how sweet they all fall upon the eye and ear—ay, even the cawing of the glossy rooks amongst the tall elms, heard through the open casement in which Seymour and Arabella now stand together, gazing out upon the bright aspect of the valley, as it glistens in the morning sunshine after the heavy rains of night.

The mild air of the May morning is wooing her soft cheek, the tender graces of the spring are saluting her bright eye, the music of the woodland songsters is thrilling on her ear, the harmony of all is sinking into her heart.

They are alone together; the old knight in his justice-room, busy in reconciling differences, and in spreading peace, has left them to themselves; there is no ear to listen but that of nature; no eye to mark the emotions of their bosoms but His who made them to feel and to enjoy. Have a care, have a care, you two young and inexperienced beings! Have a care of the gulf that is before you, and stand no longer on the giddy brink! Oh, perilous hour! Why could it not be averted? Why could the words spoken never be blotted out from the record of things done? But it is all in vain to wish, or to regret. Fate was before them, and hand in hand they went upon the way that led them to destruction.

There had been a long, silent pause, after some words of common courtesy; a pause such as takes place when people feel and know that they are upon the eve of things which may affect their whole future life. Arabella was anxious to say something upon matters totally indifferent to them both; but, busy with deeper thoughts, could find no such indifferent topic. Seymour, on the contrary, longed to talk of thoughts and feelings which had rested in his heart unchanged since last he saw her, but hesitated how to begin, lest the very first word should alarm her.

At length, however, Arabella spoke, for she felt that such long silence might seem to have more meaning than any words.

“It is nearly two years, I think,” she said, “since you went to Flanders?”

“Fully,” he replied; “and a long, dull time it has been.”

“Nay,” answered the lady, “I think that, were I a

young man, nothing I should like so much as seeing foreign lands and mingling with strange people. There must be a great delight in watching all their habits, and in the adventures one meets with amongst them."

"When the heart is at ease," replied William Seymour; "but mine was not so."

"Indeed!" said Arabella, fixing her eyes upon him. "I should have thought no heart more light."

"Truly, then, you have never seen it," rejoined the young gentleman, "for it is often heavy enough."

"I grieve to hear it," replied the lady, with a look of interest; and then in a gayer tone she added, with that attraction towards dangerous subjects which is to woman as the light to the moth, "Come, what is it weighs it down? Make me your father confessor. Woman's wit will often find a way to attain that which man's wisdom fails to reach."

"Well then, I will," said William Seymour. "I could not have a fairer confessor, nor one who has more right to assign the penance for my sins. Lady, my heart is heavy, from an hereditary disease, which has caused much mischief and much grief amongst my race already. You may probably have heard of it."

"Nay, never," answered Arabella, with real astonishment. "I always thought the very name of Seymour implied health and strength, and long life.—What is this sad malady?"

"That of loving above our station," replied William Seymour; and instantly her face became deadly pale, her frame trembled, and her eyes sought the ground.

He proceeded, however. "This sad ambition," he said, "cost my grandfather nine years' imprisonment, and well nigh his head; but he, as you well know, little cared or sorrowed for what he had suffered, though grieved deeply for the sweet lady on whom their mutual love had brought so severe a punishment."

"And she,"—replied Arabella, looking up, with the colour mounting in her cheek,—“and she grieved for him, not for herself. The Greys were an unfortunate race, however. How strange is the will of God, that of two so beautiful and excellent, Jane should perish on the scaffold, and Catherine waste her best days in prison! Yet methinks they must have been both happy even in their misfortunes, both suffering for those they loved."

"'Twas a sad trial and test of affection," said William Seymour.

"Yet one that any woman would take who truly loves," replied Arabella.

"Ay, that is the point," he answered, looking down. "Such love may, to her who feels it, compensate for all suffering, and, to him who possesses it, repay the sacrifice of all, even of life itself. But, what must be the fate, lady, of one who loves as deeply as man can love, yet sees the object far above his reach, without one cheering hope to lead him on, one cause to think the passion in his own heart has awakened any return in the being for whom he could cast away his life, as a gambler does his coin?"

"It must be sad, indeed," said Arabella, in a low and hesitating tone,—“sad, indeed,” she repeated. “But yet, perhaps—” and there she paused, leaving the sentence incomplete, while her colour varied like the morning sky as the sun rises in the east.

“Yet such is my fate,” rejoined her companion; “such has been the weight upon my heart, which has crushed its energies, quelled its hopes, made the gay scenes of other lands all dull and empty, and even in the field deprived my arm of one-half its vigour. Oh! had the light of happy love been but before me, what deeds would I have done, what things accomplished—Arabella,” he continued, taking her hand, and gazing in her face—“Arabella?”

She did not withdraw it; but she turned away her head, and with the fair fingers of the other hand chased away a bright drop from her dark eyelashes.

It was enough; his arm stole round her slight waist. She did not move. His lips pressed her soft cheek. A gasping sob was her only reply. “Arabella, Arabella! speak to me!” he said; “leave me not in doubt and misery!”

One moment more she remained still and silent; then, starting from his arms, she brushed her hair back from her forehead, with a sad and bewildered look, exclaiming, “Oh, Seymour, spare me!—This takes me by surprise—this is unkind;—think—think of all the risk, the danger, the sorrow——”

“I have thought, beloved,” he replied, “through many a long and weary night, through many a heavy and irksome day. I have paused, and pondered, and doubted, and trembled, and accused myself of base selfishness, and asked if I could bring danger, and perhaps unhappiness, on her whom I love far, far before myself. Arabella, I have sought you not. I would never have sought you! But we have met; and in your presence, I am a poor,

weak, irresolute creature, powerless against the mastery of the passion in my heart. Rebuke, revile, contemn, tread upon me, if you will; I am at your feet, to do with as it pleases you."

She shook her head with a sorrowful smile, murmuring, "It is for you I fear!" But, then, suddenly raising her eyes towards heaven, while her lips moved for a moment, she added, "No, Seymour, no; I will not plunge you in misery or danger. Your bright career shall not be cut off or stayed by me. No, no; it is better not to speak or think of such thing. My life may pass, cold and cheerless, in the hard bonds of a fate above my wishes; but you must cast off such feelings.—You must forget me, and in the end——"

"Forget you, Arabella?" he interrupted,—“forget you? You little know the man who loves you. Whether you be mine or another's, I will remember you till life's latest hour;” and he kept his word.

"I will never be another's," replied Arabella. "Fear not that, Seymour. Happily, all the interests, and all the jealousies of whatever monarch may sit upon the throne of this realm, are certain to combine in withholding my hand from any one. I have no sufficient dower to make me worthy of the suit of princes; the only attraction in their eyes might be some very distant and unreasonable claim to a crown I covet not; and I shall find it no difficult task to persuade the King to refuse this poor person to any one to whom it might convey a dangerous, though merely contingent right. I will live on," she continued, resuming her lighter tone—though there was ever a certain degree of melancholy ran through her gayest moods,—“I will live on in single freedom, with a heart, perhaps, not unsusceptible of affection, had fate blessed me with a humble station, but one which will never load itself with the guilt of bringing sorrow and destruction upon the head of another.—Nay, Seymour, nay, say no more! I esteem you highly, regard you much—perhaps if out of all the world——But let that pass! Why should I make you share regrets I myself may feel? It is in vain, it is impossible; so you must utter no farther words upon this matter, if you would have my company, for I must hear no more.—Come, let us walk out and talk of other things. We will go watch the rivulet that dances along, like the course of a happy life, sparkling as it goes, to find repose, at length, in the bosom of that vast, immeasurable ocean, where all streams end.—Nay; not a word more, if you love me!”

“I do! I do!” cried William Seymour, pressing his

eager and burning lips upon her hand,—“I do! I do, Arabella! better than anything else on earth.”

“Well, then, peace!” she said, “peace! for your sake and for mine; for nothing is so hopeless on earth as the love we feel.”

We feel! The confession was made! the words were spoken; and, though Seymour feared to urge her farther then, they sunk into his heart, a sweet solace for the years to come.

Poor Arabella Stuart! If she thought, by the walk along that gentle stream, through those soft fields, amidst the old trees waving over head, listening to the voices of the birds, feeling the tender air of spring, talking over a thousand subjects, in which the ever-present impression of their love was only repressed in words to find utterance in vague and fanciful allusions,—if she thought by such means to cure her lover or herself of the disastrous passion which he had so boldly, she so timidly, acknowledged, alas! she was very, very much mistaken. Like the spirit of the Universal Deity of the Pagans, their love was all around them in everything they saw, or heard, or felt, in every word they uttered, unseen, but powerful, throughout the whole creation.

Yet she thought she was seeking safety; and her spirits rose in the unconsciousness of danger, and the certainty of present happiness. Thus, when, some time after, they were joined by the master of the mansion, there was nothing whatsoever in her manner to show that she had been agitated or alarmed; and when they returned to the early dinner of those days, her heart seemed so light, that one might have thought not a drop of royal blood was running in her veins.

“You are very gay,” said William Seymour, in a tone almost reproachful, as they entered the hall.

“So gay,” she answered, “that I could sit down and sing;—but I fancy cold Sir Harry West,” she continued, turning playfully to the old knight, “whose heart no fair lady could ever bring into tune with her own, has not an instrument of music in all his house—no virginals, no lute?”

“Nay,” replied the old knight, “you do me great injustice, fairest lady. I have all my life been the devoted servant of bright eyes. ’Tis but that I have loved them all so well, I never could be such a niggard of my heart as to bind myself to one; and, as to instruments of music—that sweetest of all the many modes of poetry—though virginals, God bless the mark! with their dull tinkling, I

have none, yet I possess a lute in my own chamber, such as all the rest of England cannot boast, framed with great skill in Venice, by the famous Mallesini, who taught me how to use it, too, when I was in the City of the Sea, and used to serenade all the Venetian dames."

"All?" exclaimed Arabella, shaking her finger at him. "Fie upon such democracy in love! In that, at least, I would be a monarch, and reign alone, or not at all. But, pray send for this rare instrument, Sir Harry; I would fain try how it will sound under my weak fingers."

"Add but your voice, and the music will be sweet enough," said William Seymour, while the old knight went himself to bring the lute. But Arabella replied not; and a shade of deep sadness passed across her fair face for a moment.

"He is tuning it," she said, the instant after, bending her ear to listen to some sounds which came from a neighbouring chamber. "He is a kind and excellent man." When Sir Harry re-entered the room, she took the lute, and after running her hand for a moment over the strings, sang one of those little ballads which perhaps obtained for her a place in Evelyn's list of fair poets.

SONG.

"Who is the boy comes stealing here,
With looks demure and mild?
Keep off! keep off! Let him not near!
There's malice in that child.

"Yet, see, he plays amidst the flowers,
As innocent as they;
His smile as bright as summer hours,
His eyes as soft as May.

"Beauty and Grace his vestments are;
To sport seems all his joy.
Gaze if thou wilt, but keep him far,
There's danger in the boy.

"How various are his gladsome smiles,
His every look is bright;
Sure there can be no wicked wiles
Within that thing of light!

"Lo, he holds out a flower to me,
A rosebud like a gem!
Keep him afar! Dost thou not see
The thorns upon the stem?

"Vain was the warning given ; the maid
Clasped to her heart the boy ;
But could not pluck him thence. He stayed,
And stayed but to destroy.

"Sweet Love, let others be beguiled,
Thy treacherous arts I fear,
Keep afar off, thou dangerous child !
Thou shalt not come too near !"

She ended, and turned a gay look upon Sir Harry West, saying, "That is your history, noble friend, is it not?" and then, ere he could answer, fell into a deep fit of thought, which gave to William Seymour the assurance, and it was a sweet one, that her heart was not so free as she would fain have made it appear. The rest of the day went by in varied and pleasant conversation, though over the mind of William Seymour and the Lady Arabella deep fits of thought, not unmingled with anxiety, came shadowy from time to time, like the clouds of an autumnal sky. Sir Harry West quitted them no more that day ; and Seymour began to imagine that he had some suspicion of all that was passing in their hearts. But on the following day, again, they were once more left alone together for some hours ; another and another day succeeded ; and words were spoken that nothing could recal.

CHAPTER V.

NEITHER good soldier nor good man was ever without love for his horse, if he had one ; and the reader may have already divined, from certain words let fall by good Sir Harry West, that he was peculiarly careful and attentive to the four-hoofed creatures under his care. Every man on earth, probably, has his particular point of coxcombry, and Sir Harry West was not without his. It showed itself in his garden and his bowling-green, in his old hall and in his old wine. In a slight degree it was apparent in the studious simplicity of his dress ; but it was more evident than anywhere else in his stable, where six as fine horses as England could produce, two of them being old chargers who had borne him in battle, had as much care bestowed

on their toilet and their meals as ever court-lady and reverend alderman.

Mounted on one of the stoutest of these well-fed animals, Matthew Lakyn, an old soldier, and an old servant, sped on towards the fair town of Newark-upon-Trent, intrusted by the knight, as his most confidential attendant, to carry the letter of the Lady Arabella to the Court of King James, which was then on its progress from the land of the monarch's birth, towards the capital of his new kingdom. As usual in those days, the good old man bore upon his arm a badge to distinguish the family to which he belonged, representing, to use heraldic terms, on a field, argent, a fesse dancettée, sable. A buckler was on his shoulder, a stout sword by his side; and although, as we have said, he was not young, yet he was hale and hearty, and looked well capable of dealing a blow or biding a buffet.

His first day's journey went by quietly enough. For ten miles of his road he only saw one person whom he did not know, and that was a stout, dark-browed horseman, who passed him within five minutes after he had left his master's gate. They exchanged a word of salutation on the road, a courteous custom of those days, which, with many another, has gone by in our more civilized times; and then the stranger rode on, while old Lakyn pursued his course more slowly.

Towards three o'clock on the evening of the second day, the good knight's messenger turned into a small village-house of entertainment, in order to give his horse some food, and apply some of the good things of this life to his own support. The room which Lakyn entered, after seeing to his beast's accommodation, was not exactly like that in which we first introduced the reader to the Lady Arabella Stuart; but it was a small parlour, approached by two descending steps from the road side; and this he found tenanted by two men, sitting on either side of a small table, with a stoup of wine between them, and their heads close together, in earnest conversation.

One of these men we shall not describe, having done so on a former occasion, when he gave himself the name of Baron de Mardyke. The other was one of the personages who were with him at that time, whom he had then called his servants, and whom we did not honour with any particular remark. We must now, however, be more particular, and state that he was a tall, thin, black-bearded man, close-shaved, except a small mustachio, and a tuft of hair upon the chin, neither of which seemed to be the

growth of many months. His dress, which was plain, consisted entirely of black and grey; but he wore sword and dagger, though there was a slouch in the shoulders, and an awkward disjointedness about the limbs, which spoke of no long military training. Both he and his companion were booted and spurred as if for a journey; and the moment that Lakyn entered the room they ceased their conversation abruptly, and looked round, as if not well pleased with his presence. The old man, however, was in no way disturbed by theirs; but, seating himself at another table, he stretched out his limbs, to rest them more conveniently, and waited patiently till the flagon was brought him. The strangers, in the meantime, sipped their wine together, and talked of the weather, of the appearance of the crops, and various other things, which were somewhat too evidently distant from their thoughts.

This had gone on some quarter of an hour, when suddenly the door of the room was again thrown open, and in strode the dark-browed horseman who had passed the old servant on the road. He cast a glance round the chamber as he entered, and his eye rested upon Lakyn for an instant; after which he passed on to the table where the other two were seated, and, bending over it, spoke with them for a few minutes in a low tone.

Sir Harry West's good servant was an old soldier, as we have said, and had many of the qualities of his class. He recognised his fellow-traveller immediately; but, seeing either that the other did not remember him, or affected not to do so, he gave not the slightest indication of having himself a better memory. He applied himself, on the contrary, diligently to his ale; and, though it must be confessed that he listened with all his ears, from a curious sort of mistrust or dislike which he felt towards the whole party, yet he heard nothing but the last words of their conversation, which were, "Find out!"

The moment these two monosyllables were pronounced by the Baron de Mardyke, the last-comer quitted the room. After being absent for about five minutes, he returned, and again spoke to the other two in as low a voice as before. Matthew Lakyn, however, thought that he caught the words, "Going on immediately;" and he said to himself, "If they are talking of me, they speak the truth. Neither shall I lose any time upon the road."

Thus thinking, he rose, quitted the room, paid his score, and, having tightened his horse's girths, and replaced the bit in his mouth, he rode on upon his way, at a more rapid pace than he had heretofore employed during his journey.

He was now just entering Rutlandshire ; and in those days a great quantity of common land, waste and dreary enough, lay between Stamford and Grantham, especially about Witham, where a large extent of dreary ground, some four miles across, according to the course of the high road, and spreading to five or six miles on either hand, presented not a single house, cottage, or hut, as far as the eye could reach. After riding on for about an hour and a half, Lakyn saw this wide heath extending before him, with nothing to relieve its bare monotony but a clump of tall trees, about two miles in advance.

Now, he was anything but a man of a faint heart ; but still so many charges had been given him regarding the letter which he bore, that he had conceived that document to be of much greater importance than it really was ; and, as the bearer thereof, he had risen to considerable importance in his own eyes. Those were somewhat lawless times, it must be remembered, when, notwithstanding the wisdom with which Elizabeth had ruled, the comparative thinness of the population, and the general state of society, left many opportunities for violent acts, of which there were not wanting persons to take advantage. Why or wherefore good Matthew Lakyn had taken a strong dislike to the party he had just left, we shall not attempt to explain to the reader, as, in truth, the good man could not explain it to himself ; but certainly he had thought of them more than once as he rode along the highway ; and, when he reached the edge of the common which we have mentioned, he turned in the saddle and gave a look behind him.

As he had been slightly ascending for some time, his view comprised nearly a mile of the road, and at about half that distance he perceived two horsemen following him at a very rapid rate. Recollecting a warning of his master in times of old, to be always prepared for whatever might happen, the old man assured himself that his sword played easily in the sheath, and then spurred on, disdaining to quicken his pace to any great degree, but still keeping his horse at his very quickest trot, in the hopes of coming near some house before he was overtaken. Those who followed, however, whether out of sport or any more serious intention, did not spare the speed or wind of their beasts ; and the moment they came upon the common ground, they quitted the sandy road for the turf at the side, and put their horses into a gallop. This pace soon brought them to the side of Sir Harry West's good servant, where they seemed inclined to pull up,

giving him time to recognise the dark-browed gentleman whom he had twice before met with, and the tall, thin ungainly man whom he had seen in the inn. The former now thought fit to give him a nod of recognition; and Lakyn, whose wit was upon the stretch, exclaimed, with a laugh,

"Ah! good evening, sir. If you are riding races, my masters, I'll beat you across the common for a stoup of wine;" and, without waiting for a reply, he struck his spurs into his good horse's sides, and was soon several lengths ahead. The others spurred after for some way, but did not succeed in catching him; and he was still going at the same rapid rate, when he approached the clump of oaks which we have already mentioned. There, however, he drew in his rein suddenly on the little knoll from which trees sprang, and which was covered with dry green turf. To his very great comfort and satisfaction, he had perceived as he approached a large party of men and women, in gay attire, seated with baskets and panniers, in the shade, apparently resting their horses and asses—for several of both were there—and at the same time indulging their own appetites, at the expense of sundry pasties and cold joints of meat.

"Hallo!" cried one of the travellers, as the old servant approached. "Are you riding for your life, or has your horse run away with you?"

"Neither, neither," cried Lakyn; "'tis but a race for a stoup of wine with those two gentlemen behind;" and with some difficulty he kept his horse from dashing forward, determined, now that he had met with company, not to lose sight of it again if he could help it.

"Why, you seem mighty happy, ladies and gentlemen," he continued. "May I ask which way your steps are bent?"

"We are going to meet the King as he comes from Newark," said a jolly-looking man. "We have got an address and petition from the town of Oakham, drawn up by our good clerk."

"Then, by your leave," cried Lakyn, springing to the ground. "I will go on with you. 'Tis not good riding alone in such days as these."

"Alone!" exclaimed the other. "Why, you have a queer notion of solitude, having two companions with you."

"One may have companions that are not comrades," answered Lakyn; "and, to say sooth, these are no friends of mine."

"Why, how now!" cried the black-browed man, riding

up at this moment, about fifty yards in advance of his fellow-traveller; "why, how now, master serving-man, you have soon come to an end of your race. We shall be at the other side of the common first, and make you pay your losings."

"Ride off, then," said Lakyn, in a jeering tone. "With two such jades as yours I don't fear you. I'll give you a start half-way to the other side, and beat you, notwithstanding."

The man turned a grim look of a somewhat menacing character upon him, and replied, "We will make you pay, if you lose, depend upon it."

"No fear, no fear," answered Lakyn; "ride on, and spare your horses' wind till I come up with you. I'll make you use whip and spur before I have done with you."

As he spoke, the other stranger joined them; but he took no part in the conversation, only saying to his companion, "Come on, Slingsby, come on!" and forward they rode together.

"Why, you will lose your stoup of wine," said the jolly traveller under the trees, addressing Lakyn, while the others proceeded on their way.

"Small payment for good deliverance," rejoined the serving-man. "I love not the looks of those two gentlemen; and, as I am going on an errand from good Sir Harry West, my master, to his highness the King, I must risk nothing till it is accomplished."

"What, Sir Harry West, of Bourne?" cried a grave-looking gentleman in ruff. "If you be one of his people, right gladly will we have you in our company; for, in the question of the meadow at Merton, he decided in favour of Oakham, like a worthy good gentleman, as he is."

"Those are his arms, I think," said Matthew Lakyn, pointing with pride to the badge upon his sleeve.

"To be sure! to be sure!" replied the grave personage, putting a pair of large horn spectacles upon the bridge of his nose. "Polly, my dear, look, those are Sir Harry West's arms. Don't you remember how he said to me, 'Thou art a very sedate and reverend person, Master Smallit, and have given your evidence in a devout and proper manner?'"

The girl confirmed her father's recollection; and the good townspeople of Oakham seemed to think that they could not show too much civility and attention to the servant of Sir Harry West. They were rather slow, it is true, in their motions; but, nevertheless, Matthew Lakyn was willing to put up with a little tardiness, for the sake of the

security their company afforded, and, accordingly, he not only proceeded in their company to Grantham that night, but begged leave to make one of the party to Newark the next day. His patience was somewhat tried, it is true, in the morning, by the very different proceedings of the good people of Oakham, from the military rapidity and precision which usually attended his master's journeys when they took place. The hour appointed for setting out was in itself somewhat late, being no earlier than nine; but Mrs. Polty, the wife of one of the principal personages in the company, had a queasy stomach, and could not travel till she had broken her fast. The morning-meal took more time than had been expected, and half an hour was spent in settling the landlord's score; then it was discovered that one of the horses had a shoe loose; and then half the baskets and panniers were still unpacked. Thus, what between eating, and drinking, and scolding, and grumbling, and shoeing the horse, and packing the panniers, and loading the asses, and mounting the steeds, the hand of Grantham dial pointed to twenty minutes past eleven; and then ten minutes more were spent in bidding good-bye to the host and hostess of the inn, and laughing and tittering at the parting jests.

The fourteen or fifteen miles which lay between Grantham and Newark occupied much more time than was required even by the slow pace at which they marched, for numerous parties were on the road, either coming or going to the good town upon Trent, where the King had arrived during the preceding morning, and with each person who would stop to indulge them, the good townfolk of Oakham paused to gossip, making manifold inquiries as to the court, and the King's appearance and demeanour; on all of which points they received the same sort of satisfactory information which is usually afforded by common rumour. By some persons they were informed that the King was tall, and thin, and fair; by another, that he was a fat, swarthy man, with trunk-hose of prodigious dimensions, and a large Spanish hat upon his head. Again, they were assured that the court displayed great pomp, and was very unapproachable; and again, that all was freedom, and gaiety, and rejoicing.

Thus proceeding, it was near four o'clock before the little party entered Newark, and then it was with the greatest difficulty that they found accommodation in a fourth-rate inn, at the extreme verge of the town, on the side of Nottingham. All was bustle and confusion in the place, notwithstanding the proclamation; the court-yard was crowded with horses; and eating and drinking, which had begun at

five in the morning, was still going on with undiminished voracity. A buzz of manifold voices came from every room in the house, above which arose, from time to time, various loud and angry calls for tapsters, ostlers, and landlord. Margery, the host's pretty daughter, had had more kisses ravished from her in one day than ever she bestowed willingly in her life; and the landlord, bustling about, and vowing that he should be ruined and undone by the confusion that reigned in his establishment, took ample care that if any one did, indeed, escape his vigilant eyes without paying their scores, the more honest, or less fortunate, should abundantly make up for the deficiency.

For some time it seemed, though the citizens of Oakham had acquired a somewhat importunate appetite on the road, that no provisions were to be had for love or money; and, leaving Masters Smallit and Polty to settle that affair as they might, and get all ready against his return, Matthew Lakyn, with due reverence for the business with which he was intrusted, went out at once on foot, to deliver the letter to Sir Robert Cecil.

Well aware of the difficulty of getting to a great man's presence in the midst of a court, Lakyn determined, in the first place, to inquire for one of the servants of the famous minister, with several of whom he had been acquainted when his master had frequented the gay scenes of the capital. On this errand he was bustling along through the crowds which nearly blocked up the principal street of the town, when, in a group of persons at one of the doors, he caught sight of the well-known colours of the Cecil family, and the badge, with its barry and escutcheoned field; and making his way through, he was soon shaking hands with an old compotator, whom he had not seen for several years. His business was easily explained; but, on hearing of the letter, the serving-man put on a wise and diplomatic look, such as official personages assume to nip a request in the bud before being driven actually to refuse it.

"Is it a petition?" he asked; "for 'tis not easy to bring petitions to my good master. He abhors them as a love-sick maiden hates cheese."

"Oh, dear, no," replied Lakyn, with a proud toss of the head. "My master is much too great a man, as you well know, to make petitions. If any one wants his services they must petition him, and are very likely to get refused, even then. I do not know, for I have not seen, what the letter contains; but I rather think it is a civil excuse for not coming to wait upon the King. But, you know, he is tired of courts, and wishes to spend the rest of his life in

peace, doing good to all around him by his wonderful wisdom."

"Oh, if that be all," cried the servant, "it will soon be done. It is of those who come to court great men are afraid, not those who stay away from it. Come away up with me to the house yonder; and, as Sir Robert gets off his horse after the hunting, you may deliver him the letter yourself."

Lakyn was in the midst of his reply, telling the servant that there was a party waiting for him at the inn, and that he would but give them notice, and return in a minute, when there was a sudden cry of "The King! the King!"

All was in a moment bustle and confusion. Some men on horseback, riding forward, drove back the crowd on either side of the road, making a lane for the royal cavalcade to pass; and, in the change of movements which took place, —as these harbingers were careful to treat more roughly those they did not know than those they did, it naturally happened that the servant of Sir Robert Cecil and his friend obtained a position in front of the rest.

"Now," said the man, "now! My master is coming just behind the King, on this side. Step forward with me as he passes, and give him the letter. I will tell him who you are."

Lakyn looked down the street, and, at the distance of about thirty yards, beheld a somewhat corpulent and heavy-looking man, on horseback, riding with a slouching and uneasy air, coarse in feature, clumsy in person, with his broad lips partly open, and the tip of his tongue visible beneath his teeth. He had a small cap or bonnet on his head, and a long feather, clasped by a large jewel. His dress was of a bright, and somewhat glaring green; a hunting-horn hung at his side, and a long knife, but no sword; and ever and anon, as the people shouted, "God save the King! God save King James!" he bowed his head with a sidelong inclination, which was anything but graceful, though he seemed by his self-satisfied look to fancy it very gracious. Behind him came a crowd of gentlemen, amongst the first of whom appeared a personage, who, though slightly deformed, displayed the dignified carriage of an English gentleman, and sat his fiery horse with ease and grace. Lakyn immediately recognised Cecil, and was in the act of stepping forward to speak to him, when, putting his hand to the black velvet pouch, which, suspended by a belt over his shoulder, contained the important letter, he found the fingers of a stranger, armed with a knife, busily employed in cutting it away from his side.

Turning suddenly round, the old man caught the cut-purse by the throat, instantly recognising the black-browed Master Slingsby. Sir Robert Cecil's servant threw himself upon him also, having been watching quietly for the last half minute the man's proceedings in regard to his companion Lakyn. Slingsby endeavoured to cast off his opponents and make his escape, while the people gathered round, exclaiming "A cut-purse!—a cut-purse!—Away with him to prison, away with him!"

The tumult thus occasioned right in the King's path could not fail to attract his attention as he rode on; and, though several of the officers of the court hurried up to see what was the matter, and to remove the obstruction by driving back the crowd, in not the most ceremonious or temperate manner, the King himself rode forward, exclaiming, "What is it they cry? what is it?—A cut-purse?—Let the man be brought before us; we are the best judge of such matters."

These words were pronounced with a strong Scottish accent, and many an interjection peculiar to the monarch himself; but albeit we are not ourselves without drops of Scottish blood in our veins, we do not possess the tongue in sufficient purity to venture upon giving the monarch's expressions in their original dialect.

"Hold him fast," continued the King, "hold him fast; and let him be brought before us, with the witnesses against him. We will inquire into the case ourselves at nine o'clock this night, after we have had time to repose ourselves, and take some necessary sustenance."

Plenty of hands were ready to secure the unfortunate Master Slingsby, who, seeing that he was detected in the fact, affected to treat the matter as a jest, acknowledging that he cut the strap of the man's pouch, but only for the purpose of seeing what it contained. He was hurried away to prison, notwithstanding; and Sir Robert Cecil's servant remained in the midst of the crowd with Lakyn, answering the innumerable inquiries of the multitude, which were as vague and wide of the point as usual.

One man demanded, in a serious tone, if the culprit did not wear a brown beaver; and, on receiving a reply in the affirmative, shook his head ruefully, exclaiming, "Ah, the villain!"

Another made particular inquiries as to his beard; and a third was sure he had seen him somewhere, but could not tell where. A fourth wished to know whether he had cut the strap with a knife or a pair of shears, and opined that

it would make a great difference in the judgment of the King.

Drawing his friend away from the mob as soon as he could, Sir Harry West's messenger asked in a doubtful tone, "Do you think the King will really examine him himself?"

"Ay, that he will, Matthew," answered the servant, "and perhaps judge him too. Nay, shake not your head: we have seen strange things done since the court crossed the border. So, at all events, you be ready to give your evidence; and I will call in for you at half-past eight, so that we be not late if his Majesty inquires for us."

Lakyn promised to be ready, and, with this appointment, they parted.

CHAPTER VI.

THE recital of the adventure which had just taken place in the streets of Newark, and the apprehension of Slingsby, may well be supposed to have produced considerable excitement amongst the party from Oakham, who had seen that worthy gentleman pursuing their good friend Matthew Lakyn over the heath near Witham; and Messrs. Smallit and Polty were extremely anxious to accompany Sir Harry West's servant to the presence of the King as witnesses. To this suggestion, however, Matthew Lakyn gave no encouragement, and Sir Robert Cecil's man, who made his appearance exactly at the hour appointed, put a decided negative upon it, saying that the court was already more crowded than it would bear.

Hurrying through the dark streets of Newark, Lakyn and his companion were soon in the King's ante-chamber, where they found good Master Slingsby guarded by some of the constables of the place. The few hours of imprisonment which he had undergone, and perhaps the conversation of those who held him in custody, had worked a great change in the demeanour of that personage; and he was now evidently inclined to treat the charge as a more serious affair than he had thought it at first. He would fain have spoken to Lakyn, and beckoned him to come

across the room ; but the constables rebuked him sharply, and one of the attendants of the King exclaimed, " No, no ; no cogging here ! "

A minute or two after, the door of the King's chamber, against which was stationed a halberdier, was thrown open by some one within, and a voice called, " Bring in the prisoner and the witnesses ; " and entering the adjoining room, after Slingsby had been led forward by the officers, Lakyn found himself in the presence of the King. James was seated in a large arm-chair, dressed in the same garments which he had worn in the morning, with hands and face not particularly well washed, and an air of slovenly untidiness about his whole person. In fact, he was distinguished from the rest of the court principally by being more unlike a gentleman than any one present. On his right hand stood Sir Robert Cecil ; on his left, some other officers of the crown. A bishop, and two or three clergymen, were also in the room ; and the circle on the King's right was extended by the mayor and corporation of Newark, who had that night been graciously admitted to his presence. Before him, at the moment Lakyn entered, stood the tall dark man, whom we have seen as Slingsby's companion on the road ; and with him the monarch seemed conversing in a familiar tone, though his eye wandered constantly from the person whom he was addressing to those who came in at the door, following them round the room, till they had taken their stations at the opposite side.

" Your petition, man," he said, speaking to the man who stood before him, " shall have all due consideration ; and, depend upon it, rightul and even justice shall be done ; but I would fain ask you a question or two thereanent. You call yourself an English gentleman, and your petition smacks of the humanities. I dare to say, now, you have had a good education ? "

" Much pains have been bestowed upon it, sire," replied the stranger.

" And, if a king may be so bold as to ask," said James, with the same broad Scottish accent of which he found it difficult to divest himself, " where was it carried on, Master Winter, if such be your name ? "

The man hesitated for a moment or two, and then replied, " At Oxford, sire."

" And at what college, man ? " demanded the King, turning a shrewd look towards Cecil.

" At Corpus Christi College, your Majesty," answered the personage to whom the question was addressed.

" A very learned place," replied James, " though some-

what given, we have heard, to the doctrines of popery. But our memory, man, is very long and troublesome, and, as we take great delight in the progress of our subjects, especially in those studies which are vulgarly called the humanities, we have diligently perused the names of all the scholars at our two universities in the kingdom of England, and we cannot just readily recollect the name of Winter amongst those who matriculated at Oxford within the last five-and-twenty years. It is true that the memory of a king ought, by God's grace, to be better than that of a subject. However, we may fail, as all men; so just recollect yourself, and see if you have not studied also in Rome; France, or Brabant. It is not so easy to deceive us, man, as some folks think; and you have so much the look of what is profanely termed a seminary priest, that we would fain take further informations concerning you."

Master Winter, as he called himself, turned as pale as ashes, and began in a hesitating manner to acknowledge that he had studied some time on the Continent.

"Doubtless, doubtless," cried the King, "and have taken all the degrees and orders. Are you ready, sir, to receive the oath of supremacy, acknowledging that in this realm of England the supreme rule and governance of affairs ecclesiastical are in the King alone? What! you make no answer! Well, then, you see you are found out. My Lord Bishop,—having now opened the examination of this man, so that your lordship may clearly see and learn the course in which we would have it conducted, we give the case over to you for farther investigation; and should it turn out, as we believe, that a papistical priest has dared to intrude himself into our sacred presence, we will have him committed to be dealt with according to law. Let him be put in charge of a pursuivant, and perhaps to-morrow we may hold farther discourse with him, in the hope of opening his blinded eyes, and reclaiming him from his errors. Stand down, sir. Let the other fellow be brought forward—not so near, not so near. He is as ill-looking a body as ever I set eyes on. Where are the witnesses?"

While the man Winter was removed to the other side of the room, Lakyn, Sir Robert Cecil's servant, and two other persons, who had been standing near in the crowd, when the attempt to cut off the pouch was made, advanced, and were examined by the King touching the whole transaction. The facts were clearly proved beyond a doubt; and it was also shown that the man had not denied the attempt.

"Well, sir, and what have you to say for yourself now?"

demanding James. "Have you any evidence to rebut this charge?"

"May it please your Majesty," replied Slingsby, "I do not deny that I attempted to cut off the pouch; but——"

"What! then you make confession, man?" said the King. "This is the eighth or ninth time since we left Berwick that robbery has been committed upon persons attending our court, and, now we have got you, we will make an example, depend upon it."

"I wished but to see what the pouch contained, your Majesty," exclaimed Slingsby, in a dolorous tone.

"Just like all other robbers and plunderers," answered James; "they all want to see what the purses they take contain, and the more the better."

"But, but," cried the man, "it was only curiosity."

"Hout tout!" exclaimed James, "such curiosity as that must be stopped with a rope," (or, as the King expressed it, with a "wuddie,") "and being the sovereign judge, to whom all other judges in this realm are merely subservient, or assistant, having tried the case ourselves, and finding this man taken in the act, and not making denial of his guilt, we shall proceed to pass sentence upon him according to law, ordering him to be taken back to prison, and thence, to-morrow morning, at six of the clock, to the place of public execution, there to be hanged by the neck until he be dead. Let a warrant be prepared, directed to our Recorder of the town of Newark, for due execution of our sentence."

Every person in the room looked almost as much aghast as the unhappy prisoner; for such a gross and unheard-of violation of the laws of England seemed to every one more dangerous than if a thousand cut-purses had escaped.

"But, sire—" exclaimed Cecil, stepping forward.

"Not a word, Sir Robert—not a word," cried the King. "We will have no pleading for him. He is taken in the fact, confesses his crime, and it is but right and befitting to make our English subjects know that we hold the sword of Justice with a firm hand, and will not fail to strike at all offenders against the law. Take the man away—let the warrant be made out and executed without fail. As we are a crowned King, we will not bait a tittle of our sentence."

The courtiers looked in each other's faces, and the unhappy Slingsby was dragged away, endeavouring to stammer forth some appeal to the King's mercy and to the laws of the land. But no one attended to him; and so great was the popular excitement in favour of a new monarch,

that, although such an act had not been committed since the darkest period of British history, no one ventured to oppose it, and the warrant was made out according to the King's command.

James himself seemed not to entertain the slightest doubt or hesitation in regard to his own proceedings, nor indeed any sorrow or compunction for the fate of the unhappy man whom he had just doomed to death.

"Well, now," he cried, addressing Lakyn, "the cut-purse being disposed of, let us see the pouch, man."

Lakyn, who held it in his hand—for the strap by which it was suspended had been quite cut through—immediately presented it to the King upon his knee; and James, taking it from him, without farther ceremony undid the loop and button, and put his hand into the inside. Feeling, however, that some degree of ridicule might attach to him for displaying the same curiosity which he had condemned so severely the minute before, he began a discourse in justification of his own proceeding, full of all those quaint niceties and hair's-breadth distinctions on which he prided himself. He explained in the first place, in broad general terms, that conduct which might be criminal in a subject was perfectly justifiable in a king. He then went on to show more at large that the impropriety or propriety of a man's actions depended entirely upon the circumstances and the position of the man himself, exemplifying his truisms with various homely and strangely contrasted instances, from the rights of a schoolmaster in birch and cane to the rights of a monarch on the throne; and certainly in both cases he was inclined to stretch prerogative sometimes beyond its just limits. He ended, however, after a discourse of a quarter of an hour, during which time his fingers still remained in the bag, by declaring that evidently the man's pretext of curiosity was false and absurd. "For why," asked the King, "should he have a greater desire to see what was in one bag than in another?"

"Why, may it please your Majesty," replied Lakyn, "I do think the man said true in that, for knowing that I was bearing a letter to your Majesty's court from the Lady Arabella Stuart,—that is, not to say that he did know it, but he might, for all I can say to the contrary.—However, he followed me all the way down from Cambridgehire, and as there were more people with him, I can't help thinking it was a plot to get the letter and see the contents."

"Ha!" cried the King, turning pale—"a plot already? Did we not tell you, Sir Robert, did we not tell you, Tay-

lor, that it would not be long first?—Why, what's the matter there? The man seems to have tumbled down," and he pointed with his hand to the other side of the room, where there was a good deal of bustle about the spot where the personage who called himself Winter had been standing in custody of a pursuivant.

"What's the matter there, I say?" cried the King. "Will nobody answer their Sovereign Lord and Master?"

"It is the priest, your Majesty," said the pursuivant; "he has fallen down in a swoon, after complaining much of the heat."

"Let him take care that he get not to a hotter place," answered James, "but take him out, man, take him out, and keep him in the ante-room till further orders.—Now, man, what is this you tell me?" he continued, turning to Lakyn; "a plot, did you say?"

Lakyn, according to the King's command, and in answer to his manifold questions, detailed all that had occurred since he had left Sir Harry West's house, and the reasons which made him suspect that he had been watched and pursued. On one point, however, it must be acknowledged, he was not quite sincere with the King, never hinting the slightest suspicion that the man whom he had seen in the King's presence under the name of Winter, was one of those by whom he had been dogged.

The truth is, however, that good Matthew Lakyn had, in common with other Englishmen, a great respect for the laws of the land, and loved not to see them violated, whether by King or commoner. James's dealing with the man Slingsby had shocked all his notions of an Englishman's rights and privileges; and he was resolved that he would not willingly bring another under the rod of a monarch who seemed inclined to make such an arbitrary use of his power. His account seemed to give the King great satisfaction, however; for there are many men whose minds, like the body of a ferret, are so constituted as to find themselves most at ease when twisting in and out, through long and intricate holes; and nothing pleased the first of our Stuart race so much as tracing the small lines and narrow connexions of any plot or intrigue.

While making these inquiries, the King had drawn forth the letter of the Lady Arabella, and kept turning it in his hand with an evident inclination to open it, although he must have seen clearly that it was not addressed to himself. The presence of Cecil, however, restrained him from the pitiful act; and after one or two woful looks of irresolution, after thrusting his hand once or twice into his pocket, and

twitching the ties of his stuffed doublet, he gave the letter to his English councillor, saying, "There, Sir Robert, there! This epistle is addressed to you, though by my soul, man,—” and he added an oath which for so pious a monarch was neither very reverent nor cleanly,—“I know not why our cousin has not addressed herself to us. Read, read, man; and let us hear the contents as far as may be in discretion.”

Cecil immediately took the letter, and without displaying in any degree the hesitation which he really felt, he merely opened it, and having spread it forth, put it into the King's hand.

“Well and dutifully done, Sir Robert,” said James, with a gracious inclination of the head, and then commenced reading as follows in a tone which, though somewhat subdued, rendered the words audible to those who were immediately about his person, commenting from time to time, as he proceeded, after his own peculiar fashion.

“Sir Robert, my very good friend,—This is to let you know, that being on my way, as in duty bound, to present my humble services to his Majesty the King, and to congratulate him on his accession to the throne of this realm of England,—Rightly said, for we were in full possession of Scotland before; but she should have added Ireland and France. She is but a young thing, however, and the letter is not that ill written.—‘I have been informed that his Majesty at York published a proclamation, forbidding the approach of any to his court except those specially called. Knowing that obedience to the commands of our Sovereign Lord is the first duty of a subject, I have stopped at the house of my old and respected friend, Sir Harry West.’—A wise and elderly person, I trust, ha, Sir Robert? For it does not do for maidens of the blood-royal to sojourn at the house of flaunting courtiers.”

“A very wise and reverend gentleman, sire,” replied Cecil, “of three score years, or thereabouts.”

“That is right—that is right,” continued the King, “and, indeed, she shows a just discretion in all things. Would that all our subjects would take example by her implicit obedience to our best commands. But what says she farther?” and he proceeded to read,—“‘Sir Harry West, where I was driven to take refuge, as I shall shortly explain to you. I do beseech you, therefore, Sir Robert, to lay my humble duty before the King, and to petition him that I may be permitted to approach him in person, not alone to pay respect and reverence to him, of which he must be well assured, both on my part and that of all his

subjects, but also to communicate to him certain discourses which were held to me in an inn near this place, where I had thought to spend the night. Now, though these discourses were light and foolish, and unworthy the attention of so great a King, yet, as they seemed to me of a treasonable kind of folly, and were also Popish, and contrary to the established religion of the realm, I did not choose to abide under the same roof with the strangers who had held them; but, notwithstanding, it being a dark night, and tempestuous weather, came on to this house of Bourne, where I have been kindly and hospitably entreated. Judging that the matter which drove me from the inn should be revealed to his Majesty before any other person, I will not enter into farther particulars; but beg you to solicit for me his gracious permission, not venturing to write to him myself, to present myself in his court, according to my duty.

‘Yours, most assuredly,

‘ARABELLA STUART.

‘From the house of Sir Harry West, at Bourne, this — day of May, 1603.’

“A well composed and very judicious letter,” said the King; “though in her inexperience this young lady has committed one error, which we shall, notwithstanding, freely pardon, as it was not of malice,—namely, that she did not cause the immediate arrest of these persons, but in all others she has conducted herself discreetly. You will be pleased to answer her, Sir Robert, telling her that as we tend towards your good house of Theobald’s, we shall be glad to see her there, and hear more from her, letting her know that we commend her prudence and obedience, and do her grace accordingly. Now, man, where’s the warrant? Please God, we will sign it without farther delay.”

“It is usual, sire,” said Cecil, resolved to make one effort, “to put a man upon his trial before——”

“Hout! puddings’ ends!” cried the King. “What! taken *flagrante delicto*, and making confession of his crime? Give me the warrant, man; if I am a crowned King, and there be hemp in England, he shall end his days in a tow before noon to-morrow.”

The warrant was accordingly placed before the King, whose face had grown somewhat red at even the slight opposition he had met with. A small table, with pen and ink, was brought forward, and with a quick and determined hand James signed a paper, which might at any other time have shaken the throne of England.

"There!" he said, when he had done. "Convey that to the Recorder of Newark, and let him disobey at his peril. Answer the lady's letter to-night, Sir Robert, and take good care of her messenger, who seems a sober and prudent person."

"Your Majesty was pleased to say," replied Cecil, "that there was another letter to be remembered; but, whether you will be pleased to answer it yourself, or commit the task to a secretary, I know not."

"What talk you of? what talk you of?" exclaimed the King, somewhat impatiently. "By my soul! I will write no more letters to-night."

"It was concerning that excellent good soldier and politic gentleman, Sir Walter Raleigh," replied the courtier, "and his application to be permitted to wait upon your Majesty."

"Fie now, Sir Robert, to trouble me with such matters," replied the King. "Let the man wait. He has no title, I trow, to be importunate."

"Certainly not, sire," replied Cecil; "but persons who have been greatly favoured by monarchs do sometimes presume, and Sir Walter, as you know, was a prime favourite of the late Queen, as, indeed, his merits well deserved. Doubtless her Majesty gave no heed to the charge of atheism against him, and forgave his hatred against my Lord of Essex. But, as your Majesty knows, being captain of the guard, he may think he has some claim——"

"None but our pleasure, man! none but our pleasure!" cried the King. "His malice at Essex, poor fellow! will be no grace in our eyes; and as to his atheism, that shall be inquired into. We will have none such about the court. Tell him to mind the proclamation; and, hark ye, gossip, there may be a new captain of the guard some day. Make the letter short, and do not say too much; we will do everything civilly, but I am thinking we can find a captain of the guard amongst our own friends;" and with these words began the ruin of Raleigh.

The King soon after rose, and retired to rest; the courtiers remained for a few minutes conversing with apparent frankness over the strange scene which they had just witnessed, yet none of them venturing to give his real opinion to his neighbour; but Sir Robert Cecil afforded no one an opportunity of misrepresenting his words, for, after merely ordering his son to take care of Lakyn, he quitted the room to write the letters according to the King's command.

CHAPTER VII.

IN a house not far from the Strand, there was a dark room, of somewhat large dimensions, lined with small square panels of black oak. The mantelpiece was of the same wood, richly carved with monkeys, and devils, and many a wild creature of the imagination, supporting the various cornices and crowning the three-twisted columns on either side, while, on a sort of entablature, appeared, in marquetry of sandal-wood and ebony, the whole history of King David, from his first encounter with Goliath of Gath to the death of Absalom. The figure of the Psalmist king, it is true, was not in the most harmonious proportions, his head being somewhat larger than his body, and his crown, after he had attained the dignity of empire, rather larger than his head. Goliath, from his protuberance before, must decidedly have taken but little exercise, and appeared to have had a fondness for turtle and venison, so that he might be strongly suspected of having sat as an alderman at the civic festivals of Gath. About Absalom, however, there could be no mistake, for his hair, which was of black ebony, could have belonged to nobody else on earth but himself, and greatly resembled the contents of an unpicked mattress. Some bears and stags were introduced, for reasons unassigned, and there were harps enough in various parts of the piece to have served David for twenty more books of psalms than ever he composed.* Nevertheless, it was a very splendid piece of sculpture in its way, and was the only thing that enlivened the room, if we except a silver sconce of three branches, with the lights which they contained.

In this chamber, not many days after the events which we have lately related, sat a very respectable personage, about the middle age, dressed in costly, but serious coloured apparel, of the Spanish cut, while near him appeared a gentleman considerably younger, in the highest mode of the English fashion. The countenance of the

* A similar mantelpiece is still to be seen in the house of J. Wood, Esq., of Sandwich, in which Queen Elizabeth resided during her visit to that ancient town.

latter bore a quick, impatient, and somewhat discontented air, and while he spoke he continued to trifle with the roses in his shoes, stirring them from side to side with the point of his sword. The language that they both used was French; in which tongue, however, the elder gentleman was much more fluent than the other, although he himself did not speak it with perfect purity, mingling, from time to time, several Spanish expressions, and several Dutch ones also, with his conversation.

At the moment which we choose for the purpose of introducing them to the reader, a short pause had taken place, and each seemed buried in thought. At length the elder looked round at his companion, saying, "Well, my Lord?"

"Well, Count?" replied the other, and both fell again into thought.

"It is not impossible, I repeat, Lord Cobham," continued the elder at length, "though the sum required be large—I say it is not impossible, upon the conditions I have mentioned; but, if you look at the matter rightly, you will find that it is not less for your safety than for the security of the King my master, that these three points should be ascertained. First, at the head of the party must be one who can lay a good title to the crown of England. There is but one that I know of, and she must be ours—of course, not to rule and guide us till she be actually upon the throne, but as the colour and pretence of our opposition to the King of Scotland, the rallying-point of the party, and our justification in the eyes of Europe. Her title is better than his, inasmuch as she is directly descended from Henry the Seventh. She is also English by birth and education, which he is not; and long ago the English nation pronounced that they would not have a foreigner sit upon the throne. But not only that, I find that the law of England declares no alien can inherit landed property in the realm. How, then, can an alien, like this King James, inherit the crown, with all the domain attached to it? This I have explained to you all before, and this is absolutely necessary as the first condition. In the next place, my very good Lord, I must see some commander of great distinction engaged in the cause. Not that you are otherwise yourself than a good and skilful soldier, in whom we could have all confidence, and for whom——"

"Pooh! pooh!" cried Lord Cobham, "let us cease compliments, Count Aremberg. What you want, of course, is some man whose name and reputation, as well as his valour

and skill, will inspire the whole party with trust. But I will vledge myself for such a man."

"For whom?" demanded Count Aremberg.

"None other than my old and dear friend, Sir Walter Raleigh," replied Lord Cobham. "He will never hang back when Cobham asks him to draw the sword; and, moreover, he has already received disgust which makes his blood boil. I saw him this morning, with a letter from Cecil in his hand. The King refuses to see him, and he has a cool and complacent hint that he had better resign his honourable post of captain of the guard. An auspicious commencement of a new monarch's reign, to slight and injure the best servants of the crown. What! you look dark, my noble Count, remembering whose good sword has been so often drawn against the power of Spain. But let not that be a stumbling-block. Raleigh will serve his country when Spain is our friend as well as he served her when Spain was her enemy; and whoever wishes to pull down this slovenly Scotch tyrant—whose first act in England was to violate the laws of the land he came to govern, must be a friend to our native country."

"Nay," answered Count Aremberg, "you misinterpret my looks. Courage and high qualities deserve respect as much in an enemy as in a friend; and assuredly Sir Walter Raleigh has shown all the great points of a distinguished captain. It is a pity, only, that his Queen gave him no other occupation than that of a pirate."

He could not refrain from the sarcasm; but, seeing the colour come up in Lord Cobham's cheek, he proceeded hastily, "I shall be right glad to see him draw his sword in a nobler career. But, can you be sure of him?—Have you sounded him?"

"Not yet," replied Lord Cobham,—“not yet; but I will undertake for him; only he must have money to equip his forces. That is the first necessity, and without it he is too wise to act. Now, Sir Count, to your third demand. I forget what it was—something of less importance than the others, I think."

"Not in my estimation," answered Count Aremberg. "It is, that the heads of the Catholic party in England give you their adhesion; and herein, my Lord, seems the greatest difficulty, for the favour which the King has shown to the two Lords Howard has greatly divided the feelings of those who in this country adhere to the true faith."

"Pshah!" cried Lord Cobham; "a piece of paper and a lump of wax will soon set all that to rights. I mean a

papal brief, my Lord. 'Odds life! you zealous Catholics ought to know right well that there is not a man of you who will venture to refuse his aid and assistance in re-establishing the old ecclesiastical rule in England; and I have little doubt that, were it necessary, a brief of his Holiness would be found, ere to-morrow at noon, within the limits of this good city of London, commanding all true children of the Apostolic Church to give their aid in excluding the heretic Scotchman from the throne."

"Indeed!" said Aremberg, with a doubtful look. "If it be so, his Holiness has not made his intentions known to the Court of Spain."

"Pshah! most excellent sir!" replied Lord Cobham. "Use not your diplomatic qualities on me, for it will only lengthen our discussion without attaining any end. You know of the Pope's bull right well; and your only object is to save the claim of the Infanta. But, be assured, that no alien will ever sit upon the throne of England, if James be rejected."

Count Aremberg smiled, and it must be remarked that his smile was always a coarse and unpleasant one.

"Well," he said, "granting that it be as you declare, and that the King of Spain be willing to aid in the great and laudable object of re-establishing the Catholic religion in these realms, still, as he must make a sacrifice of the claims of the Infanta, he is entitled to some compensation. What have you to propose on that head?"

"We will first terminate the question of the three conditions you require, worthy Count," replied Lord Cobham. "Two of them are disposed of; you have the Lady Arabella as the head of the party, Sir Walter Raleigh as its military leader; and I have shown you good means of insuring that the Catholics of England will readily draw the sword for a lady, whom we have every reason to believe well disposed to that church. However, if you want more proof, I can bring you the head of one of our chief Catholic families, and two excellent priests of your religion, named Fathers Watson and Clarke, who will pledge themselves for the rest of their community. The good fathers are below even now, and Sir Griffin Markham will be here in a few minutes."

He rose as he spoke, as if to call the priests into the room; but Count Aremberg stopped him, saying, "Stay, my Lord, stay. Give me yet one minute of your private company. The last point is perhaps the most important of all."

"Ay, so I thought," cried Lord Cobham.

"What is the King of Spain to receive as an equivalent,"

continued Count Aremberg, "for relinquishing the claims of the Infanta?"

"I will show you what her claims are worth," said Lord Cobham, putting his hand in his pocket: "thus much, and no more, most excellent Count;" and he laid a silver groat upon the table, pointing to it with the forefinger of his right hand.

"'Tis a small sum," observed the Count, "for very great claims. But I did think that something was mentioned about the loan or gift of six hundred thousand Spanish crowns. Now this, my noble Lord, is a considerable amount for any prince to give, especially when it is to be employed for the purpose of doing away the claim of his own family, though that claim be but worth a groat. Your Lordship must see," he added with a dry laugh, "that something as an equivalent must be assigned to the King before he can entertain your proposals."

Cobham frowned, and bit his lip. He could not but feel that there was much force in what the Spanish ambassador said; that he had no right to expect, indeed, that the King of Spain, whatever might be his bigotry in favour of the Church of Rome, would give so large a sum of money, and at the same time resign long-cherished, though chimerical hopes, without some strong human consideration totally independent of religious zeal. He was not prepared, however, with any proposal to meet Count Aremberg's objection, and consequently remained silent, turning the matter moodily in his mind. Here the conference might have broken off, perhaps; but a quick step was heard upon the stairs, and he exclaimed,

"Here comes Sir Griffin Markham! It were as well to be silent with him regarding this difficulty. The Catholics are easily discouraged. I will discuss this question in secret with you hereafter."

As he spoke, the door was thrown open, and in came, booted and spurred, a cavalier younger than either of the other two, with a frank and somewhat reckless bearing, and an air of affected indifference, as if he were entering some gay drawing-room.

"Ha! George," cried Lord Cobham, "is that you? I thought it was Markham. When did you arrive?"

"Five minutes and a half ago," replied Sir George Brooke. "I saw the King safely housed at Theobald's, and rode on hither with all speed. Monday will see him at the Charter House, my good brother, where you need not show yourself unless you like, for you will not have too gracious a reception."

"You know Count Aremberg, I think?" rejoined Lord Cobham. "Count, you know my brother?"

The Spanish ambassador bowed; and taking up the cover of a richly-chased cup which stood upon the table, he said, "This is exquisitely wrought, my lord. Pray, are your goldsmiths in England equal to such nice work as this?"

"Nay, that came from Italy," replied Lord Cobham, impatiently. "But, to return to the matter before us, your Excellency need not fear my brother. He is the soul of our party."

"I have nought to say more than I have said," replied Count Aremberg. "I am here but to learn your wishes, and to hear your proposals; very willing to give you any aid and assistance in my power—with due regard for the interests of my master, the King of Spain."

"Well, Count, what does the King want?" cried George Brooke, casting himself nonchalantly into a chair. "There is excellent brawn at Oxford, excellent cheese in the county of Cheshire, capital venison all over England; but, bating these articles, we have nothing else to give that I know of."

"Except, it would seem, a crown," replied Count Aremberg; "for that trifle you appear profusely disposed to deal withal, taking it from one, denying it to another, bestowing it upon a third. What I ask, sir, is, when you require his most Catholic Majesty to resign the claims of the Infanta, and to bestow upon you six hundred thousand crowns, for the purpose of raising a young lady of your own country to the throne, what inducement have you to offer him?"

"Hum!" said George Brooke, pursing up his lips; "various things that his Majesty has sought for many a year. First, a great deal of confusion in England—perhaps a civil war. What a splendid set-off against the destruction of the Armada! Secondly, the re-establishment of the Roman-catholic religion. We may throw in a few fires at Smithfield; and, if the matter be fully completed, perhaps we may grant a touch or two of the Inquisition, at least as far as the rack and thumb-screws go; though, as to the whole order of St. Dominic, and other piebald gentry of the kind, I cannot exactly promise;—that must depend upon circumstances."

"Weighty considerations these, certainly," answered Count Aremberg, gravely; "but I do not think that they would figure well in a dispatch."

"Better in a private and confidential letter," said

George Brooke, in the same easy tone. "However, for the public document, we will have a firm and lasting peace between England and Spain,—an alliance offensive and defensive, if you will."

"A treaty," exclaimed Count Aremberg, shaking his head; "we have too much parchment in Spain already. The kingdom is covered with sheepskin."

"Can you get no wool off it?" asked George Brooke. "Methinks just now, with the most Christian King of France and Navarre on the one side, Meynheer Van Barneveldt on the other, and the unpleasant aspect of the Emperor on a third, the Court of Spain, and more especially that of Brussels, might be very well pleased to have the helping hand of England, and rather see Raleigh thundering on the coast of Holland, than setting the Indies in a flame, and sweeping the sea of your galleons."

"Were England at peace with herself," said the Spanish ambassador, "this proposal might have some weight."

"But she shall be at peace within a year, most excellent Count," replied George Brooke. "Let us but harpoon this Scotch porpoise, and confine him for a season in the Tower, and then the very hem of sweet Arabella's satin petticoat shall sweep the land clear of all contention."

"But what," asked Count Aremberg, "if she choose to give her fair hand to some enemy of Spain?"

Lord Cobham smiled, saying, "You are wondrous cautious, Count."

"Ha! are you there?" cried George Brooke. "Well, there we are prepared to meet you. We will engage that the lady shall be guided in her choice by the King of Spain."

"Now you speak reason," replied Count Aremberg; "but yet I will tell you that it will be more satisfactory to me and to my master, if the lady herself make the engagement. In a word, as these are your proposals and not mine, if you can gain me the assurance under the lady's own hand, guaranteed by yourselves, that she, when Queen of England, will grant full toleration to the Catholic faith, will sign a lasting peace between England and Spain, and be guided by the sovereign I represent in her choice of a husband, the matter may go forward: if not, I must pause."

"It shall be done," said George Brooke, and Lord Cobham echoed the same words. "But," continued the former, "are you ready to give us assurance that if we do, our request is granted?"

"Nay," replied the ambassador, "I cannot give a defi-

nite promise. That must depend upon the King himself."

"Then this is all foolery," said Lord Cobham. "The opportunity will be lost sending between London and Madrid."

"You know right well, my Lord," replied Count Aremberg, "that I was not sent to England on this matter, and consequently I have no instructions."

He saw a cloud come over the brow of George Brooke, the bolder and less cautious negotiator of the two, and added a few words to soften the disappointment which was evidently felt, and to give such hopes as might prevent the conspiracy from being abandoned in despair.

"I can but speak my own individual opinion," continued Count Aremberg, "but, such as it is, you shall have it frankly."

"Frankly?" cried George Brooke, with a bitter laugh.

"Yes, on my life," answered the ambassador; "and it is, that there cannot be the slightest doubt his Majesty the King will at once consent to supply the money you require, if you give him the assurances which I have pointed out. Nay, more," he added, in a quiet tone, "should need be, he will, I feel very sure, furnish you with a body of soldiers sufficient to take the field at once."

"No, no," cried George Brooke, "no Spanish soldiers in England, noble Count. The people have not yet forgot some late passages, in which the Spanish soldiers and the English were less friendly than is pleasant. They did nothing, it is true, but cut each other's throats; but still that does not cement amity."

"They need not be Spanish soldiers," said Count Aremberg, in reply; "they may be from Flanders."

"Still they will be the troops of a foreign sovereign," answered Lord Cobham.

"Not if you raise and pay them yourselves," said Count Aremberg, always bearing in view the strong inclination of the Spanish crown to regain a hold upon England.

"That might be done, it is true," said George Brooke; "but that is an after consideration; the present question is about the money. If we once have the means of engaging a sufficient number, by showing them that we have strong support, and that the enterprise is feasible, we may seize upon James, confine him in the Tower, and, with the command of the capital, which we shall certainly possess, we have little resistance to fear. An outbreak may take place here or there amongst the Scotchman's friends in the country, but they will be speedily suppressed. The two

Howards *must* remain neuter; for, though their inclination would lead them to James, their religion will bind them to us. Northumberland, though he will not begin the strife, will go with us heart and soul when it is begun; and so will a thousand other noble gentlemen, who have long suffered in their faith, or in their persons. Others, again, will be upon our side, from hatred to the Scotch, and disgust at the swine that Scotland has sent us. The great body of the church will go with us; for ambition is the great vice of the ecclesiastics, and the re-establishment of the Romish hierarchy must naturally open to them a thousand new roads to their end. Many a sober Protestant parson regrets the confessional, and the mass, and the procession, and the embroidered garments, and the lordly rule of each priest in his parish; and we should have thousands gladly coming back to the good old days of Rome. But the question is now, how are we to get the means of setting the enterprise agoing? James's movements are uncertain; on Monday he will be at the Charter House; on Wednesday or Thursday at the Tower; where he may be a fortnight hence no one can tell. You cannot count upon a reply from Spain under six weeks, and it is necessary to secure the bird while he is in the net. Six weeks' delay will be ruinous."

Count Aremburg paused and mused, and, after waiting for a minute or two, in expectation of his reply, Lord Cobham exclaimed, "Unless we can have some certainty in less time than that, it were better to give the whole thing up, and think no more of it."

"If the question be but regarding the money," said the Count, "I doubt not the Archduke can settle that point at once. I believe that, sooner than suffer a scheme for delivering his fellow Catholics from the yoke under which they now groan, to fail, he would advance the sum out of his private treasury."

"Although that may cause some delay," said George Brooke, "still it will not present such an obstacle as the other plan. If this can be done, then, and your Excellency is enabled by the next courier from Brussels to treat definitely, we will go on, and obtain for you the assurances you require from the Lady Arabella. If not, I fear the enterprise must fall to the ground."

"I will write immediately," replied Aremburg, "and send the dispatch by a trusty messenger."

"It were well," said George Brooke, "that he were accompanied by some one on our part. What think you, Cobham—will Watson go?"

"Nay, Clarke is the shrewder of the two," replied his brother.

"Settle that between yourselves as you like, gentlemen," said Count Aremberg, with the appearance of perfect indifference—though, to say truth, he was not at all disinclined that a great part of the responsibility of the transaction should be removed from his own shoulders, and that he should escape the necessity of committing himself on some delicate points in writing. "Choose your messenger discreetly, and in my dispatch I will refer to him as intrusted by certain English lords and gentlemen to convey their opinions upon various points to the Archduke. Now, however, I will bid me home, for I have been some time absent; and it must not be forgotten that I am at this moment sick in bed."

"I wish your Excellency a happy delivery," cried George Brooke, with one of his light laughs. "I shall come and inquire after the baby in a day or two."

"I trust it may be a stout and healthy child," replied Count Aremberg, in the same tone, "and at all events we will baptize it in the Catholic faith."

Thus saying, he took up a large cloak which lay on the back of one of the chairs, enveloped himself completely in its folds, and, lighted by George Brooke, descended the stairs, at the bottom of which he was joined by a man dressed as a servant, who was called from a little room at the side. Without a farther word, but "Good night," the ambassador issued forth into the street, and walked along for some way, with the man close beside him.

"What have you learnt, Gonzalez?" he asked at length, in Spanish, looking up and down the street by the moonlight, and seeing that no one was near.

"According to their showing, your Excellency, full one-third of the inhabitants of London are prepared to rise, and more than one-half of the country. Making a little allowance for exaggeration, the discontent seems to be very extensive, and likely to spread."

"What did they give you?" demanded Count Aremberg.

"Fifty gold angels," replied the man, after a short pause.

"Ha!" said the Count, "are you sure they did not discover you for what you are?"

"Quite certain," he replied; "for though they were civil in the matter of the money, the two priests kept me standing all the time."

"Then his Holiness is determined the matter shall proceed," said Aremberg. "Fifty angels to a serving-man do not come from two poor conspirators, or two persecuted

Catholic priests. It may, perhaps, turn out something of importance, after all."

CHAPTER VIII.

ON the confines of Hampshire and Wiltshire, at the distance of about twenty miles from Salisbury, was a good house belonging formerly to the Dowager Countess of Lennox, surrounded by a park of nearly a thousand acres, paled in from the neighbouring country on account of some very fine deer which it contained. The hand of nature had done far more for it than art, and nothing could be more beautiful than the variety of hill and dale, of forest, fell and mead, which it displayed. It is true no mountains were there, no bold and rocky scenery; but it was full of rich old woods, deep ferny dells, and constant heights and falls of ground, which compelled a considerable stream swarming with fine trout to wander in a thousand turns and bends, so that its course through the park, if traced along its meanderings, could not extend to less than many miles in length.

The woodpecker and the squirrel found there a home to their utmost satisfaction; multitudes of hares, whose possession was only disputed by the herds of deer, might be found sleeping in their forms on the sunny sides of the hill or seen galloping along when disturbed, ever and anon standing raised upon their hind feet, and listening with erected ear for any sound of pursuit; while towards the close of evening, the rabbits, in a part especially called the Warren, came out to play in thousands, like schoolboys issuing forth for sport after the tasks of the day are ended.

In this park, in the month of June, and towards the hour of nine in the morning, a lady was sitting on the grass under the trees, at a considerable distance from the house. The spot she had chosen was the side of one of the little hills, which was crowned by a clump of old oaks, and looking down over a considerable extent of scene, both in front and on either hand. It was, in fact, a sort of spur or promontory from the high ground to the westward of the park, on which ran the paling, bounding a high road. The distance between the hill and the public way, however, was

at least four hundred yards; and the intervening space was filled with wide-spreading trees, devoid of underwood; so that it was from that side alone that any one could approach the spot chosen by the lady for her seat without being perceived by her, even at a considerable distance.

The sun was rising bright over the fair landscape beneath her eyes, the wanderings of the stream were in every direction seen, like the beneficent hand of the Almighty in all his works, to the eye of the thoughtful believer giving light and brightness to the whole; and while the long shadows of the trees moved slowly as the morning sun got up in heaven, like the tardy progress of the world's affairs, the deep blue shadow of some passing clouds floated rapidly over the bright scene, resembling the free thoughts of man when his heart is at rest.

For several minutes the lady sat and gazed around her, leaning lightly on her rounded arm, and fixing her soft and thoughtful eyes, from time to time, upon each fair spot in the glowing landscape. Was she merely drinking in the flood of beauty that poured upon the eye, contemplating the magnificence of nature, feeling with delight and awe the perfection of God's works? Or were her thoughts turned inward to her own fate and circumstances, and her eye roving inattentive over things familiar to her? Neither was exactly the case; she felt the loveliness of the scene, she marked with pleasure many a fair object in the view, she looked "through Nature up to Nature's God," but still her own hopes and wishes, her own fears and anxieties intruded themselves, whether she would or not, upon her attention with importunate appeal, and connected her own fate with all her contemplations, deriving from the objects before her eyes, sometimes fanciful illustrations, sometimes consolations higher and holier than any that man can give.

Thus she sat for several minutes, and why or wherefore matters not much, nor can we indeed tell—for who can trace the wanderings of a quick and imaginative mind?—but that fit of her reverie ended with a bright drop upon her eyelids. The next moment, however, sweet Arabella Stuart roused herself, though with a sigh, to other thoughts. Oh, how hard it is when the mind, like a young bird, has soared forth at liberty, into the face of heaven, and tried its wing at large, amongst all the joyous things of nature, to be called back to the close cage of the dull world's doings, the strifes, the cares, the meannesses, which form the bars that prison in the heart. Such was her fate, however, continually through life.

As if to make the transition more easy, however, she repeated—we may call it sung, for she preserved, though her voice rose scarcely above a murmur, the air of the song—the lines of some long-forgotten poet, which were but too applicable to herself.

“I must not love where I would love,
I must not dwell where I would stay.”

“Alas, it is all in vain,” she added. “And now to the letter.”

Thus saying, she drew forth from her bosom a note, the seal of which had been broken, but of the contents of which she had, as yet, only read the first words. Untolding it, her eye ran over the lines it contained, and her cheek grew very pale; a look of anxiety and apprehension rose in her countenance; and at length, clasping her hands together, she exclaimed, “The King and all the court live in daily dread of the plague; but if these rash men did but know how much more I dread the plague of their ambitious designs, they would not surely try to communicate the infection to me by such letters as this. What is to be done with this thing now? If I reveal it, I bring the poor wretch to the block. If I conceal it, I make myself a sharer of their treasons.”

She paused and meditated for a moment or two, and then exclaimed aloud, “Oh, that I had some one to advise me!”

The words were scarcely uttered, when there was a step amongst the trees behind; and starting up with a look of alarm, she turned round. The blood rose in her cheek, her eye sparkled, though she would fain have quenched its light, and her voice faltered with emotion, as she exclaimed, “Oh, Seymour! rash, rash young man, your imprudence will be the ruin of yourself and me!”

“Nay, dearest Arabella,” he replied, with a gay smile, “neither rash nor imprudent—bold, perhaps, to watch you as you sat here musing; but I claim but the privilege of the sun, who looks at you through the green leaves, even while you fancy yourself hidden from his bright eye.”

“Nay, but you *are* rash, William,” she answered, “rash to come hither at all.”

“I could not help it, Arabella,” he said in reply, kissing her hand. “You would not have me a traitor or a rebel?”

“Heaven forbid!” exclaimed Arabella, her imagination.

immediately connecting his words with the letter she had just been reading. "Oh, William, of all things, if you would not break my heart, avoid all dealings with the many dangerous men who are striving for things impossible. But you are laughing—I have mistaken you. Nay, if you smile so, I shall call back again all my old careless gaiety, which, to say truth, has been somewhat disturbed. If you could not help coming, tell me what brings you?"

"The King's commands," replied William Seymour. "The King's commands, to bid you to Wilton on Wednesday next."

"Oh, then, the King's commands shall be obeyed," said Arabella, "and his messenger is right welcome. But how got you in? You could not come hither from the house without my seeing you."

"I sent on horses and servants," answered William Seymour, "letter and all—for there is an epistle, brightest Arabella, writ by the King's own hand, in very choice Latin, as I understand, judging you a learned lady."

"Heaven help the mark!" interrupted Arabella. "But still, how got you in, William Seymour? 'Tis very rude of you to take me so by surprise." But her smiles, as the reader has already supposed, contradicted her words.

"Nay," said Seymour, "'tis worse than that, for I did so on purpose. Dismounting on the road, I sent my men and horses on, and leaped the paling, telling them that I would fain take a walk through the park; but, in truth, having an intimation from a good enchanter that I should find Arabella beneath these trees."

"Fie, fie!" cried Arabella, "you are an impostor, Seymour, and would have me think that love can work miracles, in order to cheat me into the belief that ours can be happy. How was it, in sober truth, you knew that I was here?"

"Well, then, in sober truth," replied Seymour, pointing to the country beyond the park, which was seen over a break in the trees—"Well, then, in sober truth, beloved, as I rode along yonder bridle-way which you perceive crossing the country beyond the fence, I turned my eyes hither. Now, love is an enchanter, whatever you may think, who strangely lengthens men's sight, ay, better than the best perspective glass; and by his aid, I saw something beautiful walk slowly through the park up to this spot, and knew it was Arabella. Then, riding on till I came near, I parted with my company, as I have told you, and, like a deer-stealer, leaped the paling; then, creeping quietly through the trees, I stood and watched you as you

lay, wishing that I were a sculptor, and had power to carry away an image of that lovely form in all its thoughtful grace."

"Hush, flatterer! hush!" cried Arabella; "I would only have my image in the heart of those who love me. But it was not fair."

"Oh, yes," answered Seymour; "for whatever I saw or heard would be to me as sacred as my conscience."

"Heard!" exclaimed Arabella. "What! did I speak?"

"Yes, in truth," replied her lover; "first you sat musing; then took out a letter—this which you have dropped;" and, lifting it from the ground, he gave it to her, while she turned somewhat pale to see how nearly she had lost it. "Then you murmured something indistinctly, and then you cried, 'Oh, that I had some one to advise me!'—But you turn pale, Arabella!"

"Not at what you think," she answered, with a smile.

"Now would Seymour give a purse of gold to know what is in this epistle, and has jealous thoughts of rivals, and half doubts that Arabella plays him false. Is it not so?"

"No, on my life," replied William Seymour; "I might as well be jealous of the sun for shining on other lands than mine. Why should Arabella give me one smile, but from her pure bounty? I have no claim, I have no right, and 'twere a needless policy to let me think you love me, if you did not. One frown, one word, one cold look, were enough to crush out all the hopes you have raised, and snatch the blessing from me. Why should you deceive me? Oh, no—I am as confident of you as Heaven, and nothing shall ever make me doubt."

Arabella put her hand in his, and gazed upon him with a look of melancholy tenderness that, had there been a doubt, would have banished it for ever.

"Oh, no!" she said; "though I may never be yours, I shall never love but you; and whom should I trust but him I love? Yet before I do trust you fully, Seymour, and ask for your advice, you must promise me—for you men are sad, headstrong creatures, and we must ever bind you with some chain—that you will never reveal what I have told, or shown, or asked you—nay, even if I follow not your counsel."

"That promise is soon made, Arabella," he replied; "indeed, I should feel the engagement binding on me were no promise given; and, as to advice, you shall have the best my mind will afford, though in times so difficult as these, it is sometimes hard to say what is the wisest course."

"Well, then, read that," said the lady, "and tell me how I should act."

Seymour took the letter which she placed in his hand, opened it, and read. The effect upon him was scarcely less strong than it had been upon Arabella. His brow contracted, his lip quivered, his eye took an eager and anxious expression; and, at the end, he turned back again and read it through once more. Then gazing in the lady's face, he exclaimed, "Oh, Arabella! Have you ever given encouragement to such designs as these?"

"Never, never!" cried Arabella, "not even in my most secret thoughts."

"There may be men," continued Seymour, in a musing tone, "who think that in offering you a crown they would increase your happiness; and had I one to bestow, out of all the world I would choose you to wear it. But far, far rather, did I possess one myself, would I lay it down to share with you a humbler and a happier lot than raise you to the golden misery which ever rests upon a throne. Your virtues may deserve the highest station, Arabella; but believe me, dearest, power is not happiness."

"Except the power of blessing those we love," she answered, laying her hand on his arm.

"But were you England's Queen to-morrow," he continued, "you never could be mine. Remember Elizabeth herself, despotic as ever eastern sovereign was, ventured not to raise a subject to the throne, though no one doubts her wishes; and, besides, see what these men propose, that you should give pledges to a foreign potentate to be guided by him in the disposal of your hand. Here is evidently a bar to your free choice. Even if their schemes were feasible, or had a probability of success, which they have not, what would you become? A slave of a foreign prince, and not a queen. But why smile you, Arabella?"

"To see William Seymour argue," she replied, "as if such vain schemes and treasonable folly could wake in my breast one idle thought in favour of that which you justly call a golden misery. Besides, Seymour, I am neither unjust, a traitor, nor a fool. I would not be a usurper for the diadem of the whole world. James's is the right; he is next in blood to the last monarch, and I have no claim at all. As to what Lord Cobham says regarding exclusion of aliens from the throne, 'tis but a pretence as empty as the wind. I never can hold that man to be an alien who is born within these isles. Nature made them one, marked them out for one empire, and rolled the barrier of the sea around them to separate them from all the rest of the

earth, as the habitation of one people under one monarch. It is vain to struggle against the plans of God. Men may mark out frontiers, and draw lines, and strive for a mile or two of barren border land this way or that; but the limits fixed by nature will stand fast, and ultimately be recognised by all. No, no; James is no alien; and though, to say sooth, I never was more disappointed in the aspect of a man, yet he is King of England, and, for me, shall ever remain so. Besides," she continued, "do you suppose that I would give up my humble freedom for the gemmed thralldom of a throne; to have no privacy; to live with the thousand eyes of policy upon me; to have my very thoughts watched; to make my very mind a slave to others; my heart, with all its affections, a bondman to the petty policies of state? Oh, no, Seymour, no!—if they were here before me, with the crown at my feet, ay, and could add France to England, and take in Spain, with all the golden Indies and their mines, I would not, if a choice were left me, give them another look.—It was not that on which I asked advice."

"What then?" said Seymour, who had been gazing on her with love and admiration in his eyes.

"It is what I am to do with this treasonable paper, that I seek to know," she answered, taking it from his hand, and gazing vacantly upon it. "It is, I fear, my duty to send it to the King; and yet I would not for all the world bring on my head the blood of those who sought to serve me even wrongfully; and yet——"

"If you do not," replied Seymour, "you peril your own life. Nay more; should any attempt be made in consequence of this scheme—should they, notwithstanding a cold and reproving answer from you, seize on the King, put him to death, involve the land in civil war, and cause all the bloodshed and confusion which little more than a century ago stained all our fair fields and desolated our happy homes, what would Arabella feel, when she remembered that, from the fear of bringing bad men to punishment, she suffered all these things to arise, when she could have averted them? Shut our eyes how we will, he who conceals treason is a traitor. Besides, my beloved, you must not think that it is love for you that moves these men. It is their own selfish interests, their own passions, their own ambition. 'Tis that the King has slighted Cobham, done some wrong to Raleigh, offended this man, disappointed that, hurt the pride of another—'tis this that moves them—no deep devotion to Arabella Stuart."

"Say no more, say no more," said the lady; "I fear it

is my duty; and, however grievous, I must perform it. What you urge is true; did I conceal this, and the plot take effect, even so far as bringing civil war into the land, I should never know peace again. But tell me, Seymour—counsel me, how I may treat the matter so as to move the indignation of the King as little as possible against these misguided men. It is not long since I had to tell him of other overtures, not so distinct in truth as these, but still evidently treasonable in their kind. He then took little heed; and, perhaps, if I manage rightly, he may deal with this scheme as lightly.”

“I fear he will not,” answered Seymour; “yet it is but wise to calculate how you may follow the voice of duty, and yet excite as little wrath as may be against those who have certainly deserved it.”

He paused, and thought for several moments, adding at length, with a faint smile, “Were I you, I would treat it lightly, Arabella. We often by the tone and manner in which we speak of things, give them, in the first impressions, such importance that they can never after be dealt with as trifles. But if we speak of them as matters of small moment in the beginning, they are sure, if they be really of weight, to find their proper estimation in the end.—I would treat it lightly. My Arabella has a custom, with a gay and laughing humour, to cover from the eyes of most men the deeper treasures of her heart, like those bright streams I have seen in another land which, under the sparkling ripple of their waters, conceal their sands of gold. This art which you have used——”

“Have you found out that?” she asked. “Love must, indeed, be a diviner, then; for never, even to the companions of my youth, have I shown, by word or hint, that my gaiety was more upon the lip than in the heart.”

“But you have shown me the heart, too,” replied Seymour; “and, as I was saying, this art, which you have used to cover your feelings on many subjects, may well be employed now, to hide what you think of this. Treat the matter as an idle jest—a thing of no importance—too foolish to be judged seriously; and thus, perhaps, the King—especially if Cecil be not near him, which he was not when I came away—may take measures to avert all danger, and yet not think the subject so important as to require the sword of justice. He is of a light and trifling disposition, given to the discussion of fine subtleties, full of learned importance and self-satisfaction, but, I should think, not cruel.”

amidst perilous rocks, the pilot watches narrowly each ripple on the surface of the sea. Thus, in the dangers of a position too high for safety, and too low for power, I have scanned narrowly the actions and demeanours of men, and I have always remarked, that those who are the fondest of trifles, and give little weight to things of real importance, are generally cruel, treating human suffering as a trifle also. But *that* I must not think of; the only way for myself and them is, as you say, to give the whole a laughing air. But come, Seymour, let us go—they will think that we stay long."

"Nay, nay, dear Arabella," replied her lover; "the consciousness of our own happiness makes us often think that others see through the disguises we assume to conceal it. Let us not even lose a minute of the time during which we may be to each other Arabella Stuart and William Seymour. The time will come soon enough to be Madam and Sir again. They who know not when or how we met, will not look at the clock to see how long we have been together."

Arabella smiled. "Love's sophistry, Seymour!" she said: "but my good aunt of Shrewsbury is at the house; and, let me tell you, her eyes are quick, her thoughts keen, although she be kind and noble, and I do not know that she would frown upon our affection, even were she aware of it."

"I do not think she would," replied Seymour, eagerly; "she has ever been a kind friend to me, and, though of as lofty a spirit as any woman now on earth, yet she does not forget that there are human passions in all hearts, and that they will be listened to."

"Yet we must confide in no one," answered Arabella, with a serious air; "our secret is but safe in our own breasts. She has lately caught me somewhat in a sighing mood; and but last night, vowing I was in love, she reckoned over on her fingers some ten men of the court; but happily your name was not amongst them, or perhaps the unruly colour in my cheek might have betrayed the truth. Nay, let us go, we shall soon meet again; and as we walk soberly towards the house, we can speak all our thoughts to each other with whatever kind words we will, looking all the while demure and grave as if we were solving some deep problem of lines and angles! In good truth, William," she continued, as they went on, "were it not as well to set up some apparent lover at the court, to hide my rash friend's somewhat real suit?"

"Nay, I should be jealous, then, indeed," said Seymour.

"That would be pleasant," answered Arabella, laughing; "nothing but jealousy is wanting, I think, to make your love perfect. But I fear that he of whom I thought, is not capable of raising the sweet yellow passion in your breast. What would you say to Fowler, the Queen's secretary?"

Seymour smiled. "Oh! the crack-brained fool," he cried, "he surely would never raise his eyes so high."

"Nay, nay, you know not," answered Arabella; "I have had delicate speeches about bright eyes and coral lips, and verses over and above full of sighing swains and dying swans, and all the ammunition of pastoral love. 'Tis a perilous case, I assure you."

Seymour laughed lightly. "In truth," he exclaimed, "this is a rival to be feared. I shall go distracted, Arabella, if you give him but a glance too much."

But the lady had fallen into thought again, and, looking up, she said, "This letter, and the duty that it enforces on me, weigh down my heart, Seymour. Lord Cobham, too, has ever been kind and courteous to me—I cannot think that this treason is of his designing."

"Oh, no!" cried William Seymour, "he is but the tool, dear girl; and I trust that so it will appear; in which case it will be easy for his friends to gain his pardon. But here comes some one from the house; and now for all due reverence."

Arabella cast down her eyes with a look of painful anxiety; and the moment after they filled with tears.

"With all due reverence!" she repeated. "Alas! William, when and how will this end?"

He gazed upon her with a look of deep and tender affection, but did not reply; for a servant, evidently in search of the lady, was now rapidly approaching. As the man's step came near, Arabella looked up and said, "I suppose my aunt has sent you, Ralph, to tell me that there are messengers from the King; but I have met this gentleman in the park, and am returning to receive his Majesty's commands."

"Yes, madam," replied the man; "but I had charge to tell you also that Sir Harry West is here; and I saw Master George Brooke ride up as I came away."

Arabella turned a quick glance upon William Seymour, and seemed to catch from his look what he would have her do.

"If he wants me," she replied, "tell him I must decline to see him."

The man looked surprised, and she repeated, "Exactly

so—tell him I must decline to see him. He will understand the reason—Mr. George Brooke, I mean. Sir Harry West I shall be right happy to receive; and as I do not wish to meet with any one displeasing to me, go forward, good Ralph, and open the door into my aunt's cabinet. I will there receive the King's letter, Mr. Seymour, and write my humble answer to his Majesty."

The man obeyed, hurrying on with a quick footstep, while Arabella raised her eyes to Seymour's face, inquiring in a low but eager voice, "Have I done right?"

"Perfectly," replied her lover; "it were madness to receive him, my Arabella. Whatever you might say, it would be proved that you had held conference with one of these conspirators, and, if I judge right, with the most dangerous of them all. But see, there is Lady Shrewsbury herself upon the terrace—let us go forward straight towards her."

They did so accordingly; but, whatever were their intentions, that high but kindly dame was not easily deceived; and while she held out her fair hand to William Seymour, who pressed his lips upon it with respectful gallantry, she turned a keen glance from his face to that of Arabella.

"Welcome, Sir Truant, welcome," she said. "So you leaped the paling, I find from your men, to take a walk in the park; but I doubt me, poacher, that it was not without good expectation of meeting with a deer."

William Seymour was not discomposed, however, though Arabella was; and he replied, "If it was so, fair lady, you see I was not disappointed. I had sought for a *hart*, I might have been so."

Many a grave thing in those days was covered by an idle play upon words; but the shrewd Countess shook her head, and a moment or two after took an opportunity to whisper in her niece's ear, "I fear, Arabel, I must reduce the list of lovers down to one;" and thus saying, she led the way towards the house.

"Let us go in by your cabinet, dear aunt," said Arabella, whose cheek was now glowing like a rose. "There is some one at the other side I would fain not meet."

"Whatever course you please, fair maiden," answered the Countess; "I will not thwart you;" and she turned across the terrace to the left.

CHAPTER IX.

"Not see me!" exclaimed George Brooke, with a flushed cheek and a flashing eye. "Not see me, for reasons I will know! Body of Satan! but the lady is courteous. Pray tell her, master lackey, that I know' no reason why any lady in the land should so forget that which is civil as to send so rough a message by such a messenger. Now for my horses and my people!—Ha! there she comes across the terrace; but I were wanting as much as herself in courtesy, were I to force the audience she refuses to request. My horses, sir, I say!"

"They are coming round, sir," replied the servant.

"What!" cried George Brooke, in the same angry tone, "you ordered them round as you came? See how meanness can mimic the arrogance of its masters. The cobbler's cur flies at the beggar to whom his master refuses a farthing. But every dog has its day, sirrah, and I forgive thee. There's a crown for thee to buy thee better manners, if thou canst find them—though, by my faith, I think they are all exported."

"No, sir," replied the man, putting away the crown piece with the back of his hand; "I take not money and hard words together. Neither must you say more against my lady, as sweet a one and gentle as any in the land, who never said or did an unkind thing, nor refused her presence to any who deserved it. There's not a man in this house, but will break the pate of any one who dares say aught against her, be he gentle or simple."

Brooke gave him a look of contempt, and put his foot into the stirrup, his horses having by this time been brought round; and swinging himself into the saddle, he rode slowly and sullenly away. His thoughts were all on fire, however, and his heart filled with anything but the dull sulkiness that he displayed upon the surface.

"What is to be done?" he asked himself; "the matter is clear; she has betrayed us to the King. Cobham is an idiot, to write her a letter under his own hand, when I had promised to speak to her by word of mouth. See what it is to trust fools; and yet we could not well go forward

without him. Still what is to be done now? That is the question. If Grey were ready, we might act at once, seize upon James at Wilton, and complete the affair at a blow. If not, it were better for all of us to fly. But I must show no haste, so long as there are other eyes upon me. Once past the park gates, then spur on to London, and let them know our misfortune. There is time yet; for this fatal letter could but reach her late last night, or early this morning.—Here, Jones!”

A servant rode up; and his master, after musing for a moment, continued, “As soon as we are out of the gates, ride to Salisbury with all speed; find out Dr. Watson, who is at the third house from the gate near the city wall. Tell him to come to London with all speed; say, that this being summer time, the swallows are beginning to fly; then follow me to Cobham House. Baldock, you away to Wilton, and offer my humble duty to Sir Robert Cecil, my good brother-in-law.—‘A little more than kin, and less than kind,’ as the player has it. Ask after his health; and tell my good sister that the gloves have come from France, and I would send them if I feared not the infection; but they have lain in London for some days. This done, come both of you and join me at Cobham House. Let each use well his eyes, and tell me what you see. You, Baldock, mark shrewdly Sir Robert’s face, when you compliment him on my part. I would fain know,” he added, in a careless tone, “whether I should have a good reception at the court, were I to venture thither. You are quick and keen, remark all things, and let me know the result. You may, if you make haste, overtake me before I reach London, as I shall go but slowly.”

At the park gates, the men took leave of their master, and rode on in the direction of Salisbury; while he pursued a narrow lane which joined the high London road after winding through the country for about five miles. The moment his servants were out of sight, he set spurs to his horse, which was a powerful charger, and galloped on over the sandy ground for about three miles without drawing a rein. Suddenly, however, the animal showed symptoms of going lame, and on dismounting to see what was the matter, he found that it had cast a shoe.

“Now out upon fortune!” he cried; “if I could reach London ere to-morrow morning, the affair might yet go forward; if I be delayed another day, there’s nothing for it but flight.”

He had to blame his own folly, however, rather than the fortune that awaited him; and had the delay which took

place been no greater than that which was necessary to repair the little accident that had happened, all might have gone well with him. But small vices have more frequently ruined vast enterprises than even great crimes. Ere he had proceeded half a mile, leading his horse by the bridle, he came to a little open spot, where an object attracted his attention, of which we must give some account. On the left-hand side of the road was a high bank of sandstone, retiring about thirty yards from the path, and topped with some feathery trees, which were waving their green branches in the sunshine. The foot of the cliff was covered with soft turf; and, hollowed out of the stone, was a little niche lined with masonry, having a shallow basin at the bottom to receive the clear, bright water of a spring, which issued from the bank, and, welling over the edge, formed a little rivulet running at the side of the lane.

Close to this well, which some kind hand had erected for the solace of the thirsty traveller, was seated a young girl of seventeen or eighteen years of age, dressed in a quaint and singular costume, very different from that of the English peasantry. She had a tall pointed hat upon her head, adorned with bugles, a black bodice and red petticoat, bordered with a tinsel lace, a snowy apron of fine lawn, and some gay bracelets on her arms. She was lightly but beautifully made; and, though her complexion was somewhat dark, her skin seemed smooth and soft, her features fine, her hair rich and luxuriant, and her hands and feet small and delicate. The attitude in which she had cast herself down was full of grace, but the whole expression of her figure, as well as her face, was that of deep sorrow, and the tears were running rapidly from her large dark eyes.

The attention of George Brooke was instantly, as we have said, attracted towards her; and, although it is scarcely possible to conceive that the sight of sorrow in a woman could fail to awaken compassion in the breast of anything deserving the name of man, certain it is that less than holy feelings mingled in the sensations of him who now paused to regard her.

"Well," he thought, "I suppose Dame Fortune has determined that I shall have to fly my country, and has sent me a fair companion to cheer the hours of exile. By my life! she is a pretty creature, and as enticing as a royal banquet.—What is the matter, I wonder? A quarrel with a lover?—if so, I may help her to a better—or a lost pigeon?—if so, I'll be her dove.—Why, pretty one, what ails thee?" he continued, advancing towards her.

"I am very unhappy," sobbed the girl, with a strong foreign accent.

"I see that," replied George Brooke; "and I grieve that those bright eyes should run over. But what is the cause?"

"I know not where to go to," exclaimed the girl, clasping her hands together, and addressing her words rather to Heaven than him.

"Go to?" cried her companion, gazing at her with his wild and reckless spirit ready for any folly or for any crime. "Why, come with me, sweet one.—I will take good care of thee."

The girl looked up in his face with an inquiring glance; but there was in it no look of that deep feeling, that kind-hearted benevolence, which gives confidence and hope. There was the light, half-serious, half-jesting smile, which mocks at all things, even while they are felt most weighty; the sort of scoffing carelessness with which the wicked strive to alleviate the burden of their own conscience. There was, moreover, that expression of habitual dissipation which always soon marks the man who gives himself up to vice.

The girl shook her head mournfully, and made no answer.

"Nay, nay," continued George Brooke, assuming a more serious and more feeling tone; "if any evil have really befallen you, tell me what it is, and I will help you if I can."

"You cannot," said the girl, "you cannot. I have left a very wicked old man, who brought me over to this country two years ago, to sing before the gentry and play upon the lute; and I know not where to go to."

"But why did you leave him?" asked George Brooke.

"Because he wanted me to do what is wrong," replied the girl, the colour mounting in her face and temples; and again she burst into tears. Alas! she spoke to one who had no respect for, scarcely any belief in, virtue; and his evil purposes were but confirmed by what he saw and heard.

"Nay," he said, "you shall tell me the whole story, and if it is as I think, I will bring you to a place where you shall be well taken care of and kindly treated. My horse has gone lame, so I will tie him to a tree, and sit down by you to hear your little history."

The girl offered no opposition; and he did as he said, fully resolved to take her with him to London, under the pretence of providing for her, and then using his opportunities as he might think fit.

All the first part of her tale she told without hesitation, that she was a Milanese by birth, and had been brought over—purchased, in fact, from her parents, by an English perfumer and charlatan, who had visited Italy in search of rare drugs and essences. For some time his expectations of making money by her little talents had not been disappointed. She had sung and played upon the lute, she said, before the Lord Southampton, and even the Queen; but the state of agitation at the English Court during the illness of Elizabeth put a stop to his gains; and he had taken her from place to place through the country, obtaining but little repayment for his trouble. Of the causes which induced her suddenly to quit him, however, he could obtain no farther account than that which she had already given, “that he wished her to do what was wrong.” But George Brooke put his own construction on her words, and as she had described the charlatan as old and ugly, expressing great personal disgust towards him, he fancied that she might entertain very different feelings towards a younger and a handsomer man. What farther took place may not require detail. Notwithstanding the urgent necessity for his presence in London, he sat talking with her for nearly an hour, and whither passion hurried him on, matters not; but at the end of that time a loud scream and cry for help rang along the lane, and reached the ears of a party of horsemen coming slowly from the side of Salisbury.

“Ha! there is some violence going forward,” cried Sir Harry West, putting his horse into a gallop. “Come on, come on!—Why, how now, Master Brooke?” he continued, as he rode up to the little well, beside which the girl was standing, all trembling and in tears. “Offering violence to a woman? Fie, sir, fie!”

“Ride on your way, Sir Harry West,” replied Brooke, fiercely, “and mind your own affairs.” But even while he spoke, two or three men on foot came down the lane, from the other side, exclaiming, “Ah, here she is, here she is, and here’s the fellow who has lured her away.—Have them both before the justice; he will put the rogue in the stocks, I warrant you, and give the wench an exhortation.”

George Brooke would now have given his right hand that he had not been tempted to lose time which was but too precious in his circumstances; for he easily comprehended that he might now be detained somewhat longer than would be pleasant to him. Indeed, the manner in which the men approached him, and the words which they used, showed him clearly that he himself was one of the objects of their constabulary indignation; and, if anything

had been wanting, one of the rural Dogberries exclaimed, running up to lay his hand upon the gentleman's collar, "I comprehend you, sir, in the King's name, and charge you go along with me."

At the same time, two of his companions took hold of the girl by the arm, saying, "Come along, pretty mistress, come along to Justice Scully."

George Brooke, however, grasped the hilt of his sword, exclaiming, "Stand back, fellow—put a finger on me if you dare! You are a fool, and know not what you are about. I am a gentleman, the brother of Lord Cobham."

"Gentle or not gentle," replied the constable, "lord or no lord, I am sent to comprehend you, and, please God, so I will, for enticing the girl away from her master. Draw your sword against the law, if you dare. All you standers-by, I charge you in the King's name, give me help. You see he has got his sword out, and may do me a damage."

"You had better go quietly," said Sir Harry West; "it is your duty not to resist the civil power."

"I have no time, Sir Harry, to spend upon such fooleries," said George Brooke; "I am in haste for London, sir."

"You had plenty of time," replied Sir Harry West, "to offer violence to an undefended girl. You were in no haste but now."

"Pshaw!" cried George Brooke, who saw that he had placed himself in an unpleasant predicament, "my horse had cast a shoe, and it takes no long time to snatch a kiss from a pair of ruddy lips by the roadside."

"Nor to do any other bad action," said Sir Harry West; "but you had better go quietly, sir; for if the man requires us in the King's name, we must give him aid to make you."

"I had thought," replied the other, thrusting his sword angrily into the sheath, "that gentlemen were bound to aid gentlemen."

"When their deeds are those of gentlemen," replied Sir Harry West; "if yours be such you have nothing to fear; if they be not, you have no right to apply to me for assistance: I will go with you, however, and vouch for who you are. Do you intend to resist?"

"Not unless he puts his hand upon me," replied George Brooke; "if he do, I will as surely send my sword through him as I live. Let him lead on; there is no fear of my escaping, with Sir Harry West at the head of the watch."

"You cannot make me angry, sir," replied the old knight. "Constable, do not touch him, he will go quietly. —What is it, Lakyn?" he continued, speaking to his

worthy servant, who had dismounted, and, after conversing for a minute or two with the girl, had approached his master and pulled his sleeve.

"The poor thing would fain speak to your worship," said Matthew Lakyn, in a low voice; "she seems even more afraid of this master they talk of than of Mister Brooke, though she says he used her ill enough."

"Well, hold my horse then," replied the old knight; and dismounting, he approached the girl, as she stood trembling, between the two constables, who continued to hold her tight by either graceful arm, as if they had to do with some furious criminal.

"Nay, nay, good fellows," said Sir Harry West; "take off your hands, she will go quietly enough. Now, what would you with me, my poor thing?"

"Oh, don't give me back to that wicked old man," cried the girl. "You must not; indeed, you must not."

"Are you an Italian?" asked Sir Harry West, marking her accent. "If so, I can speak your language; and you can tell me more of this affair in your own tongue."

The joy of the poor girl at hearing this intelligence sparkled brightly in her eyes; and she poured forth upon the old knight a torrent of Italian, accompanied by a thousand wild but graceful gestures, which made the sober constables of ungesticulating England begin to fancy she was crazed. In five minutes Sir Harry West was acquainted with her whole history, and had learned that her name was Ida Mara; that her father was a carver in Milan; her mother dead, a step-mother acting towards her the step-mother's part; and her only surviving parent careless and unfeeling enough to sell her for a sum of ready money to the charlatan who had brought her to England. Not even to the old knight, whose manner was certainly well calculated to encourage confidence, would she enter into particulars of the conduct of her master, as she called him. But Sir Harry West had no curiosity on the subject; she assured him, with tears, that the man had wanted her to do what was very wrong; and he easily conceived that she had received just cause to quit him.

When her tale was ended, and she looked up in the old knight's face with an appealing glance, he replied, with a kindly smile, "Do not be alarmed. If it is all exactly as you say, this man can have no power over you in England. We do not recognise here such purchases of our fellow Christians. The case will be different, indeed, if you have yourself signed any paper obliging you to serve him as an

apprentice ; but even then the law will protect you against wrong."

"I have signed nothing!—I have signed nothing!" cried the girl vehemently ; "it was all my father's doing, and I do not think he signed anything either."

"Well, we shall soon see," said Sir Harry West ; "the only difficulty is, what is to become of you if you are taken from this man?"

The girl looked down thoughtfully and sadly ; and then replied, raising her eyes with a beam of hope in them, "I can knit, I can sew, I can work all kind of things—I hate singing and playing on the lute—I used to love it once ; and it was my only comfort when my mother died ; but I hate it, now that I am obliged to do it for strange men to stare at me."

"I dare say thou dost," replied the knight, with feelings of deep interest growing upon him. "I will see what may be done for you, my poor girl ; so take comfort, for this is a land where it seldom happens that those who are really good and in distress, do not find some one to help them."

While they had been thus conversing, the whole party had proceeded on their way, George Brooke walking first, with the constable keeping a respectable distance, holding the gentleman's sword, it must be confessed, in great reverence, after he had seen how readily it sprang out of its sheath. The way was somewhat long, and quitting the lane in which they were, they turned into another on the left, before they reached the high road, upon which—as it led him in an opposite direction to that in which he wished to go—George Brooke burst forth with one of the blasphemous oaths so common in those days, adding to the constable, "In the name of Satan, and all the devils, is this never to come to an end? Why, you are taking me quite out of my way!"

"'Tis but a short mile farther to Browbury House, master," replied the constable ; "and there Justice Scully will soon settle your affair, I warrant ye."

"Warrant!" exclaimed George Brooke ; "I wish you and your warrants were at the devil. If I have any say in the world to come, you shall be kept sitting in a pair of red - ot stocks till the marrow fries in your ankle bones."

"Where will you be then yourself?" asked the constable ; and there dropped the pleasant conversation.

At length they approached the house of the justice, which was a good old country mansion, with a village round about it. All parties seemed glad to see it, except poor Ida Mara, who, terrified at the thought of meeting

her tyrant, crept up to the side of the old knight's horse, which he had remounted at the close of their conversation.

"Do not be afraid, my dear," he said; "I will see that justice is done to you. Here, Lakyn, you look to her; and take care that she be well treated. I will go in and speak to worshipful Master Scully."

"And so will I," cried George Brooke; "I am not to be kept like a lackey waiting in a hall."

The knight's name soon procured admission, but Lord Cobham's brother was kept for several minutes in the ante-chamber with the constables and Ida Mara. At first he expressed some haughty indignation; but, becoming calmer and more thoughtful by degrees, he turned to one of the constables, saying, "Hark ye, good fellow, there's a crown for you, tell some of the servants to have my horse shod, while I am kept waiting."

The man took the crown readily enough, the sight of the well-filled purse from which it came making a considerable difference in his estimation of the prisoner's culpability.

"The smith lives two miles off, sir," he answered; "at the corner of the high road; but they can run up with the beast in a minute."

"Let them do so, let them do so," replied the gentleman; "it will save time, at all events."

He then approached the side of the poor girl, and spoke a few words to her in a low tone.

"No," she cried, aloud; "no, I will die first."

George Brooke bit his lip, murmuring, "You are an idiot;" and the moment after the whole party were summoned before the justice.

He was a fat, good-humoured-looking man, who seemed to reckon his years by barrels of ale, but on whose brow sat a slight frown of habitual self-importance. Sir Harry West was seated beside him, with a clerk at the end of the table; and standing on his right hand was a tall, thin man, apparently about sixty years of age, of a very unprepossessing countenance. His white hair was thrust back from his forehead, which was narrow and low, but prominent over the eyes, which were shaded by bushy grey brows. The eyes themselves were keen and fiery; his lips were thin and in continual movement, even when he was not speaking; and his ears unnaturally large, with a gold ring in one of them, and a topaz in the other. His nose was aquiline, and depressed at the point, his complexion sallow, but his teeth brilliantly white and perfect, for a man of

his age. He was dressed more richly than his condition warranted, and with a degree of extravagance in the colour and form of his habiliments which made their costliness the more remarkable. His ruff was of the finest lace, his coat, of Genoa velvet; and his hands were covered with innumerable rings.

"That is the girl," he cried, as soon as Ida Mara appeared; "that is the girl; and I claim her as my property."

"Silence!" exclaimed worshipful Master Scully; "and let nobody speak till they are spoken to. What were you saying, Sir Harry?"

"Merely—that I thought it would be best," replied the knight, "to enter into the charge against Mr. Brooke in the first instance, as I understand that he is in haste."

"I am in haste," rejoined George Brooke; "and as to a charge, there is none that I know of against me. Methinks I must have got into the kingdom of jackasses, to be thus brought by one fool before another, for no reason whatsoever but to gratify their mutual stupidity."

Mr. Justice Scully looked perfectly thunder-struck at the insolence of this speech; and the clerk, who, having lost one of his fore-teeth, whistled somewhat in the utterance, strongly recommended that the gentleman should be committed. Sir Harry West, however, interposed; and the regular course of proceeding was commenced.

"Now, sir, what is your name?" asked the justice, turning to the old man on his right.

"My name is Jonas Weston," was the reply; "by trade a perfumer and druggist."

"Well, Master Jonas," said the justice, "if you ever do get into the whale's belly, you are just the man to give him an emetic."

The clerk and the constables laughed, but Sir Harry West looked grave, though such jests were then not uncommon, even on serious occasions; and the court proceeded to ask the perfumer what was his charge against Master George Brooke.

"None that I know of," replied the perfumer; "I never saw the gentleman before in my life, that I know of."

"Yes thou hast, thou imp of evil!" cried George Brooke, "when thou wert playing deputy devil to Mrs. Turner, of Shore Lane. But if he has no charge against me, why am I brought hither?"

"Why, your worship," said the chief constable, advancing, "that man with the earrings swore he thought the girl had gone off with some young man from the inn at

Hadleigh, so as we found him with her we brought them both."

"You did right," said the magistrate, "there was just cause for suspicion; and constables have a right to apprehend all suspicious persons."

George Brooke burst into a loud laugh. "I have heard of Hampshire hogs," he cried, "and this seems to be hog law. Sir Harry West, I wish you joy of your company, and unto the whole court a very good morning. As there is no charge against me, I shall go." Thus saying, he stuck his beaver on his head, and walked towards the door.

"Shall I stop him?" cried the constable; but Mr. Justice Scully seemed to be decidedly of the opinion of Dogberry, "The watch ought to offend no man! and it is an offence to stay a man against his will;" so that George Brooke was suffered to depart in peace, though not without having lost nearly three hours of time, which to him and his fellows was invaluable.

"Now then," cried the justice, as soon as he was gone, "Master Jonas Weston, if you have nothing to say against the man, what have you to say against the woman?"

"That she ran away without my consent," answered the perfumer.

"That is a very grave offence," said Master Scully; "is it not, clerk?"

"That will depend upon the particulars of the case," replied the clerk, with a grave look.

"How are we to proceed?" inquired the justice; and he turned his eyes towards Sir Harry West.

"I do not presume to interfere," said the old knight; "but I think, Master Scully, I have had some cases similar to this brought before me, and if you will permit me to ask a few questions—"

"Pray do, pray do," cried the justice, delighted to be delivered from an inquiry which he knew not how to conduct; "I always think it a proper compliment, Sir Harry West, to a brother magistrate, when he does me the honour to visit me, to let him do just as he likes in my court."

"You are extremely polite and courteous, Master Scully," answered the old knight. "Now, sir, upon your oath, what right have you to this girl's services?"

"Why, I bought and paid for her with my own money," replied the man, boldly.

"In this country?" asked Sir Harry.

"No," answered Weston, "in Italy."

"Lucky for yourself it is so," said the old knight; "otherwise it would have been a misdemeanour, for which you must have been instantly committed."

"Please your worship," rejoined Weston, who was not one easily to lose his hold, "the girl is my apprentice."

"Show me her indentures," said Sir Harry West; "we may have cause to cancel them before we have done."

"I have them not here with me," answered the man, with a sullen look.

"Well, 'tis no great matter," replied Sir Harry West; "for, according to your own statement, they are null in themselves, if they do exist. You paid for her, you say, instead of receiving with her an apprentice fee—the law of England recognises no such transactions."

"Well," said the man, "she is my servant, at least, and has no right to quit me without due notice, that I might provide myself with another. A runaway servant is punishable by all laws!"

"If they run away without due cause," answered Sir Harry West; "but if there be cause, I think, Master Scully, we have no law to punish them."

"Certainly not," replied his worship. "If any master requires his servant to do what is against the law of God or man, the servant has a right to run away. When you brought her to my house last night to play on the lute, she seemed very well contented."

"No she was not," answered Weston; "she told me a month ago that she would leave me."

"But what made me tell you so?" cried Ida Mara, bursting forth; "why don't you tell what you said to me? Will you tell what you wanted me to do?"

"Nothing, you fool," cried Weston, with his sharp eyes flashing fire; "you mistook what I said; but if ever I catch you, I'll take the skin off your back."

"That you shall never do," said Sir Harry West. "I think, your worship," he continued, turning to the justice, "that the case is very clear."

"So I think too, Sir Harry," replied the magistrate; "the girl must be discharged—the girl must be discharged; and if he attempts to molest her, we will punish him."

"I have some doubts whether he does not deserve punishment already," said Sir Harry West. "However, as we have no charge against him, I suppose he must be suffered to depart for the present."

"I should think, your worships," observed the clerk, in a sweet tone, while the perfumer took two or three steps towards the door, and then paused, as if unwilling to

depart without making another effort—"I should think he might be put in the stocks, as a vagabond going about from place to place, not in his lawful calling."

"He is a vagrant certainly, your worships," said the constable, "that I can certify, for he does go from place to place."

Master Jonas Weston, seeing that he was in sufficiently distressed circumstances to have an ill word from everybody, determined not to provoke farther hostility by his presence, and consequently made his way out without loss of time, while Sir Harry West and the justice consulted together for a moment, as to whether he should be suffered to depart.

"It is better, perhaps," said the knight, "to let him go. I think I have seen the man's face somewhere before; but as no one has made a charge against him of which you can take cognizance, I do not know how we could proceed with him—and now, my poor girl, what is to be done with you, I wonder?"

"Oh, sir," cried Ida Mara, clasping her hands, and speaking in Italian, "you said you would protect me. Do not, do not abandon me. You think because I am in this strange dress, that I am a wild light girl, and can do nothing but sing songs and play upon the lute; but I can do a great many things, and will do anything to show how grateful I am if you but protect me. Think what I am to do, if you send me out into the world, without money, without friends, without a home. Oh, let me go with you, I am sure you are good and kind. I see it in your face, I hear it in your voice. Let me be the lowest of your servants—anything, rather than cast me out upon the world again. For the love of God, have pity upon me!"

"I fear, my poor child," said the knight, "that in my sober and homely house, we could find no occupation for hands like yours. On my life, I believe that you are as good a girl as ever lived, and something I will certainly do for you; but the only question is, what.—I am very much perplexed, worshipful Master Scully," he continued, turning to the magistrate, who was sitting with his eyes very wide open at hearing such a torrent of a foreign language, which had never met his ear before—"I am very much perplexed as to what is to be done with this poor girl. I evidently saw she had been ill-treated as I came along, and promised she should have protection."

"Oh, let her find her way back to her own country," replied Master Scully; "I dare say she's a slut."

"I think not," replied Sir Harry West. "All I have

seen of her, though it is not much, to be sure, makes me think her a good and virtuous girl; and at near sixty years, sir, after much mingling with the world, one is not easily deceived in such things. At all events, to turn her out and let her find her way back to Italy, will not be the means to keep her good, if she be so."

"Oh, if she is a virtuous maiden," replied the justice, "that's another thing. Come nearer to me, mistress, and let me look at you."

The girl approached timidly; but Sir Harry West, who had no great confidence in the delicacy of the justice, determined to cut the matter short, and take her away with him for the time. "Come," he said, "Ida Mara; for the present you shall go with me; and I will put you under the care of the good landlady where I lodge, in the small town of Andover. Methinks I recollect hearing a high lady say, that one of her maids is going to leave her to be married. Now, if you be really what you seem, I will tell her your history, and see whether she will like to take you."

Ida Mara clasped her hands together, and gave a low cry of joy; but the old knight continued, raising his finger—"Mark me, however, Ida Mara. Before recommending you, I shall make the strictest inquiries at every place where you say you have been; and if your conduct has not been what it should be, in every respect, I can do nothing of the kind for you."

The girl caught his hand and kissed it eagerly, saying, "Ask, ask! I desire no better. If you can find I have ever done what is wrong, upon good witness, cast me off altogether. But do not take that man's word," she added, suddenly, "for he will tell you that I am headstrong, and passionate, and disobedient, though I never refused to do anything he told me that was right."

"Well," answered Sir Harry West, "so shall it be, then; but in the meanwhile, I do not know well how to convey you to Andover, my poor girl."

"Why, Sir Harry," said his servant Lakyn, who had been watching the whole course of proceedings with some interest, looking upon Ida Mara as a sort of protégée of his own, "why, Sir Harry, if we could get a pillion, she could ride behind me, or one of the other men to Andover—'tis but seven miles, and the horses are quite fresh."

"Oh, my worshipful friend," cried Mr. Justice Scully, "we can lend you a pillion. Having a house full of women here, I am always amply provided in that sort."

ARABELLA STUART.

You can send it back to me by the carrier who passes to Winchester."

"Many thanks, many thanks," replied Sir Harry West. "I will gladly accept your offer. Take her behind thee, thyself, Lakyn, for thou art older, and more sedate than the other fellows; and make as much haste as you can, for we have intruded too long upon Master Scully."

"Not at all, not at all," exclaimed the justice. "I count boldly that you will stay and take your noon-meal with me; your people and the girl shall be cared for in the buttery.—What, shaking your head? No time, I'll warrant; your courtiers are always as busy as a merchant.—Well, you must come in at least, and let me introduce you to the ladies. You must break bread and taste a cup of wine; to that there is no denial."

Feeling that, in courtesy, he could not refuse, Sir Harry West accompanied the worthy justice to another part of the house, while the servants and Ida Mara were taken to the buttery, and treated with true old English hospitality. In about half an hour, however, the whole party were once more on horseback, and riding slowly away towards Andover.

CHAPTER X.

WE must now accompany George Brooke on his way, not, indeed, stopping to trace all his proceedings, but merely stating that the time thrown away in consequence of his meeting with Ida Mara, and the loss of his horse's shoe, was not altogether less than five hours. At the end of that period, however, he once more found himself riding rapidly on towards London, and, as is usual in such cases, cursing the folly which induced him to forget great and important objects in pursuit of petty gratifications.

By six o'clock his horse was quite knocked up; and leaving it at an inn to be sent after him, he procured another, with which, at the end of about four hours more, he approached the metropolis. His thoughts had been in a wild and hurried state, and he had more than once asked himself, "With whom shall I take counsel? If Clarke be come back from Brussels," he continued, in the same train of thought, "he would be the man, but of that I am

not sure.—Cobham is such a fool, I cannot trust to him; and Raleigh's coldness in the business has shaken his constancy. It must be with Markham; he is bold and decided, though a slippery knave, I fear.—We can go on to Cobham House afterwards. Ho, boy!" he continued, speaking to the post-boy who rode with him to take back the horse, "which is the shortest cut to the village of Chelsea?"

"Down to the right, sir," replied the man; "the first turning, and then the second to the left."

George Brooke accordingly rode on, and in a few minutes caught a glimpse of the Thames, shining in the rising moon.

"Ay, now I know my way," he said, and rode straight on to the gates of an old brick house, with a garden and orchard, looking towards the river on one side, and on the other towards the road.

Ringing the great bell at the door, with his usual impetuous haste, George Brooke speedily brought a porter to answer his summons, and asked eagerly if Sir Griffin Markham were within.

"He is somewhat sick," replied the man, "and cannot see any one."

"Nay, were he sick to the death, I must see him," cried George Brooke; "methinks, however, Master Porter, that there is somewhat loud talking in the place for a sick man's house. Go, tell Sir Griffin that Master George Brooke wishes to see him, and must too, immediately."

"Oh, sir, if you be Master Brooke, you may come in," said the man; and the young gentleman sprang to the ground, giving the horse to the post-boy, and bidding him wait. Then following the porter across an old stone hall, he was admitted to a room on the other side, which he found occupied by some twelve or fourteen persons, bearing the appearance of gentlemen. A large table was in the midst, round which some were sitting, and some were standing, while one or two were looking out of the windows upon the silver Thames, as it glided along in the moonlight, calm and tranquil, the image of a bright and a peaceful life, offering a strange contrast to all the scenes of contention and turbulence that daily take place on its banks. Seated close together, so that they could whisper to each other from time to time, were two Romish priests, named Watson and Clarke; and at the head of the table, not far from them, with his cheek resting on his hand, was the master of the house, whom the reader, if he could have seen him, would instantly have recognised as no other than the Baron de Mardyke. The moment the name of George

Brooke was announced by the porter, Father Clarke started up, and advancing towards him, took his hand, whispering rapidly at the same time, "Not a word of our plans, till you hear what is going on."

"Let it go off then as quickly as possible," answered George Brooke, in the same tone, "for I have intelligence of deep importance, affecting our lives."

Thus saying, he advanced into the room, shaking hands with one or two persons whom he knew, and being welcomed by Sir Griffin Markham with great cordiality.

"We are here, my dear Brooke," said Sir Griffin, aloud, after a significant nod from the priest, "to discuss a petition to be presented to the King for toleration in our religion, and equal privileges with our fellow-subjects. We have just determined to set forth our claims in the strongest possible language, to represent the injustice that we have suffered, and to point out that, at least, two millions of Englishmen are deprived of religious liberty, and straitened in their conscience. Now, I know, that although your family have unhappily given in to what we consider heresy, yet you are ready and willing to join in obtaining for us that toleration which you would fight for in your own case were it needful; and we shall be glad of the signature of any Protestant gentlemen, who regard liberty of conscience as the right of all men."

George Brooke was too shrewd not to smile at the assurance with which zealous Roman Catholics, notwithstanding their utter intolerance of every religion but their own, can assert the great principle of that liberty of conscience which they deny to others, when they themselves may benefit by it; but as he was very indifferent to religion of any kind, he was quite ready to support the views of Sir Griffin Markham, as he would have supported those of a puritan, for any object he had in view.

"I perfectly agree with you, my good friend," he replied, "as to religious toleration, and am quite ready to sign the paper, though, remember, I am not quite so heretically disposed as you imagine, and am quite ready to receive instruction in the Catholic faith on the first convenient opportunity."

An exclamation of satisfaction broke from several of the gentlemen around; and George Brooke, eager to have the business over as soon as possible, took a pen and dipped it in the ink, saying, "Where shall I sign?"

But one or two of the more bigoted of the party exclaimed, "Stay, stay, there are some changes to be made;" and then a discussion commenced regarding several

paragraphs in the petition, some wishing them stronger and more violent, others more moderate and mild.

George Brooke sat upon thorns; minute after minute passed by in vain and often frivolous disquisitions, while he knew that the avenging sword was suspended over his head but by a hair. The two priests endeavoured to cut short the dispute, but without success. What was too strong for one party, was too weak for the other; and at length Lord Cobham's brother whispered to the master of the house, "On my life, Markham, if you do not put a stop to this, I must ride on to town. The petition is all nonsense, and can never be presented; and I have life and death under my doublet."

"I know it can never be presented," said the shrewd knight, in the same low tone; "but it has been agreed to get the petition drawn up, and signed by everybody that we can, throughout the realm, as a sort of muster-roll, that we may know those whom we can call upon in case of need. That is why it is necessary to make it as violent as possible: but what do you mean by having life and death under your doublet?"

"I mean," replied George Brooke, still in a whisper, "that your head and mine, and some dozen others, may depend upon my speaking to you, without all your Popish rabble, ere five minutes be over. I do not mind the two priests, they are men of sense, and had better hear what I have to say; but our safety depends upon your getting rid of these long-tongued gentry as fast as possible."

Markham mused for a minute or two, and then rose, saying, "Gentlemen, as there seems a good deal of difference of opinion to-night, and as Father Watson here has heard all your views, I should propose that he make a fresh draught of the petition, and have it ready against to-morrow night at nine. I dare say he can embody all your ideas; and, for my part, whatsoever so reverend and devout a priest thinks fit for the occasion, I am ready to sign."

"So am I," cried one; "and so are we all, I dare say; but—" and, as usual on such occasions, there were half-a-dozen "buts" to be spoken and commented upon, before it was finally settled that Sir Griffin Markham's proposal should be agreed to, and the company had left the house.

At length, however, the room was cleared, the door closed, and with looks in which the full anxiety of their hearts was for the first time fully displayed, the knight and the two priests surrounded George Brooke, and eagerly inquired what was the intelligence he had to communicate.

In reply, he informed them that his brother, Lord Cobham, had ventured to write to the Lady Arabella Stuart, giving her intimation of the plans formed for raising her to the throne, and requiring her consent to the conditions proposed by Count Aremberg. He told them also that as soon as he had heard of this rash step, he had set off post haste to see the lady himself, and to ascertain her feelings, in order to act immediately as the circumstances might require. He then gave an account of the reception he had met with, and ended by saying, "Now, gentlemen, you know the whole affair; what is your judgment regarding it?"

"That we are ruined," replied Clarke.

"That she will communicate the whole to the King," said Sir Griffin Markham; "she did so before regarding some overtures I made to her while James was on his way to Scotland. Luckily, she neither knew me nor Watson, who was with me; and I took the name of the Baron de Mardyke, which put them upon the wrong scent, for Mardyke, who was over just at the time, quitted England for Nieuport the day after I saw her. Slingsby and Winter, who were sent to watch her messenger, were caught; but Slingsby was hanged for endeavouring to filch the letter, and died silent, knowing that it would do him no good, but rather harm, to confess his object. Winter, as you all know, was thrown into prison as a Catholic priest, but no other charge was made against him. I fear this is a worse affair."

"Well—now, having heard your opinions," said George Brooke, "I will tell you mine. It is that this sweet lady sent Cobham's letter to the King as soon as ever she received it; some of James's people were with her when even I was there, doubtless sent over to inquire farther. We shall hear more of it ere long; and the only question is, have we any chance of success by going forward, striking a bold stroke at once, hurrying down with what men we can raise, this very night, to Wilton, seizing James's person, Cecil's, Pembroke's, the Howards', and conveying them all prisoners to the Tower? If you judge so, I am ready to draw the sword and throw away the scabbard. I am even willing to put all the Scotch vermin to death, if need should be.—It is timidity alone that ruins great enterprises. If not, the sooner we begin our travels the better, for we shall be much improved by a continental tour."

"I am for flight," cried Watson; "if the matter have gone as far as you think, depend upon it all precautions are already taken at the court."

"So say I!" exclaimed Clarke; "the case is hopeless."

"I do not know," said Sir Griffin Markham, thoughtfully; and laying his finger on his forehead, he paused for a moment or two in consideration. Ere his reflections came to an end, however, there was a gentle ring at the great bell, and all the conspirators started and looked towards the door. The next instant there was a sound of scuffling, and voices speaking in the hall. George Brooke threw up the window, and jumped out into the garden upon the banks of the Thames; but he had not taken two steps when his collar was seized on either side, and he was thrown down upon the turf.

"In the King's name!" said a loud voice; and without making the slightest resistance, he was led back into the house.

He there found the two priests and Sir Griffin Markham in the hands of the officers, with terror and dismay in the countenances of all. Brooke, however, had by this time recovered from his first consternation and surprise, and turning to one of the men who held him, he said, "May I request, sir, if not inconvenient to you, that you would take your hand from my collar? It is, as you will remark, a Spanish cut, delicately laced, ingenious collar,—most likely to suffer from rough fingers. I would not for the world put you to any inconvenience, but still it would be more convenient to me to have my throat at my own command."

"May it long be so, sir," said the man bluffly, taking off his hand: "I have some doubts of its being so, though."

"I am sorry to hear that," replied George Brooke; "it is a part of my property which, being the great channel of communication between the custom-house and the receiver-general, I shall be sorry to see stopped or cut off."

"Ha, ha, ha!" exclaimed the sergeant, who had some turn for the dry and far-fetched jests of the day; "I suppose you mean your stomach and your mouth—God send that they may not have a long separation. However, I must do my duty, and carry you to London. We must tie your hands, gentlemen,—there's no help for it."

"Nay," said George Brooke; "what there's no help for, must be submitted to.—Did you ever see a pig killed on a scouring table?"

"No, sir," answered the man.

"I am sorry for it," said George Brooke; "it is an instructive sight. This fat gentleman submits with all patience, because, as you say, there is no help for it; but he

has his squeak, notwithstanding. Nevertheless, you will let us have a cup of wine before we go. On my faith, I am both hungry and thirsty; and if you look at the countenances of those three fair gentlemen opposite, you will see that they are somewhat incommoded at the stomach."

"Come, come, I can't stay," replied the officer. "You may have some wine when you get to the Tower."

"Oh, the Tower!" said George Brooke: "we are to be taken there first, are we?"

"No, sir—first to Cobham House," answered their captor.

"Cobham House?" exclaimed George Brooke, with an affectation of surprise. "What, is poor Cobham in the scrape too? I have sins enough to answer for, so that my only puzzle is, which I am arrested for. But Cobham, poor fellow, is as innocent as a sucking dove."

"I have a warrant against him for high treason, however," replied the officer; "and I thought to find him here. But we have been deceived, it seems."

"Heaven send you the like good fortune for the future!" replied Brooke; "but if I must ride, the sooner the better, and if you could spare me the gay bracelets you talk of, I would give you my word of honour neither to make use of my own two legs, nor the horse's four in anything less seemly than a slow and quiet procession to the Tower."

"No, no, Master Lightheart, I can't trust you," replied the officer; "come, go to business, my masters!" and, in about five minutes more, Brooke and his companions were mounted, and on their way to London, guarded by a strong party of officers and soldiers.

The streets of the great city were dull and desolate; for the plague was raging sadly in the English capital, and not a soul ventured beyond the threshold of his own door, unless driven to do so by urgent business. Passing along one of the once thronged thoroughfares, they at length reached Cobham House; and, pausing at a little distance from the door, the officer in command dismounted, with two or three of his men, and, approaching with a quiet step, rang the bell. A burly porter instantly appeared; and two other servants were seen slumbering on either side of the empty fire-place. Everything betokened feelings of security; but when the porter saw by the dresses of those without, the nature of their calling and object, he would fain have banged the door to, in the chief officer's face.

Experience, however, had taught the latter to provide

against all such contingencies; and the moment that the large mass of wood rolled back, he had put his foot against it, so as to frustrate the porter's efforts at once.

"Here, Harrington," he said, "keep these good fellows under arrest, while I and the others go up to speak to my Lord Cobham."

His orders were obeyed immediately; and several of his followers entered and took possession of the hall, forbidding any one to stir on pain of death. The chief officer and three others in the meantime advanced straight up stairs to the small room where we have seen a conference held between Lord Cobham and Count Aremberg. The chamber was vacant, however, and walking on to a door that was ajar on the opposite side, the officers passed through an ante-room to another door, which they opened unceremoniously. There they found the nobleman they sought, sitting quietly reading in a dressing-gown.

"Good evening, my Lord," said the chief officer; "I am afraid you must come with us. I have a warrant to convey you to the Tower."

Cobham started up with a face as pale as death. "This is Raleigh's doing!" he cried: "the villain—the traitor—this is all Raleigh's doing! I thought he would betray me—out upon the false-hearted knave!"

"Well, my Lord," replied the man; "you and he must settle that together. He's by this time safe enough; and now you had better put on your coat, for we have no time to spare."

Cobham obeyed slowly, pausing every minute to pour forth invectives upon Raleigh, and to give way to all the wild and incoherent exclamations that rage and despair could suggest. At the end of about a quarter of an hour, however, he was conveyed into the street, and, being taken down to the bank of the river, was placed in a boat with the other prisoners, and borne rapidly onward to the dark and fatal Tower of London. Cobham would fain have spoken with his brother; and George Brooke tried more than once to give the peer a hint for his guidance; but silence was imposed upon them by the guard, and they were placed as far from each other as possible, till at length the barge was rowed slowly towards the landing-place.

CHAPTER XI.

"I must see the King, Master Graves," said William Seymour, on the afternoon of the day, some of the events of which we have just recorded, "and that immediately, if it be possible."

"You cannot have speech of him now, sir," replied the usher. "His Majesty is deep in consultation with Lord Essendon."

"Lord Essendon!" exclaimed William Seymour; "who may that be? Oh, Sir Robert Cecil, I suppose; but, nevertheless, Master Graves, I must beg you to inform his Majesty that I am here, and have something important to communicate to him."

After considerable hesitation, the usher quitted the ante-chamber and entered the King's closet. The door was partly left open behind him, and Seymour heard the monarch's voice engaged in instructing Cecil in the art and mystery of removing the dew-claws of deer-hounds. Nevertheless, he appeared not a little disturbed by the interruption of this important disquisition, said first, that the gentleman must wait, asked what need he had to be in such a hurry; and, at length, being informed that his business was of importance, he bade the usher show him in, adding, with a horribly blasphemous oath, "Let him come in, then, let him come in; but if I find he interrupts my council without cause, I will have his ears slit."

The blood came up into Seymour's face as he heard those words, and he walked slowly and with a stern brow into the King's presence, as soon as the usher threw back the door to give him admission.

"Well now, man, well," cried James, shuffling himself impatiently to the other side of his chair, "what's the matter now, that you must disturb us when in deep consultation on matters of importance? What, is this all?" he continued, taking up a letter which Seymour placed before him. "The lassie's epistle might well have waited for a more convenient season. We will criticise it at our leisure. Her style is not amiss, and deserves correction. You may go, sir; but you must learn not to intrude with trifles upon a King who has more serious matters to think of."

"The lady informed me, sire," replied Seymour, "that the letter was of the utmost consequence. She bade me promise to deliver it into your Majesty's own hand, and not to lose a moment till I did so."

"That's the way with all these women," said James, throwing down the letter upon the table; "they think that the merest trifle about them—a pair of gloves, or a pot of perfume—is as much as the safety of a kingdom, or a fundamental point of doctrine."

"The Lady Arabella Stuart said, sire," answered Seymour, taking a step towards the door, "that the letter concerned your Majesty's safety, and the welfare of the state."

"Ha!—what? What's that ye say, sir!" exclaimed the King, snatching up the letter again, with a nervous twitching of the face. "Our immediate safety? Stay, man, stay," and he opened the letter in haste.

"Odds life!" he cried, when he had read it, and before he had opened the inclosure, "she's a good lassie, and has a tender regard for our sacred person, with all due humility on her part. Read what she says, my Lord, while we peruse the inclosed."

Cecil took the letter from the King's hand, and examined the contents attentively, but with his usual cool and impenetrable look, showing not the slightest emotion of any kind. In the meanwhile, the King read through from beginning to end the letter from Lord Cobham which Arabella had inclosed, without making any remark till he came to the conclusion, when he said, "Just so, just so; this is full confirmation."

"Perhaps, sire, Mr. Seymour had better retire for a little," observed Cecil.

"No need, man, no need," replied James; "he's a discreet young man, and will not divulge the King's counsel. What think ye of this affair, my Lord?"

"The lady seems to treat it very lightly, sire," replied his councillor; "she evidently looks upon the whole matter as a scurvy jest."

"Ay, does she? and rightly," said the King, "as far as she is personally concerned; but ye see when she comes to speak of our safety, she takes up a very different tone, saying, 'Whatever affects your Majesty, however, immediately grows into a matter of such importance, that although I cannot help regarding what this Lord has written to me as even more foolish than wicked, and in fact only to be laughed at, yet I will venture to send the letter to your Majesty.' She might have spared that word," observed

the King, looking up to William Seymour. "You must tell her, sir, always to attend to the euphony of her sentences; and there is nothing that destroys it so much as tautology, producing a cacophony very unpleasant to the ear"—and turning to the letter again, he read on, "'trusting that you will rather forgive an over zeal, though it be troublesome, than a neglect of duty.' That's not amiss, my Lord; we have nothing to reprove in that phrase. Now, sir, what think ye ought to be done?" and he looked sily in Cecil's face, with an expression which the minister did not comprehend.

"I should suggest, your Majesty," replied Cecil, "under correction of your wisdom, that a warrant should be immediately issued for the apprehension of this Lord Cobham. Though it is usual to call the council together upon such an occasion, yet your Majesty's undoubted prerogative, and the necessity of haste, well overstep such ceremonies."

"True, my Lord, true," said James; "for if a rat-catcher lets all his dogs run on before him, he'll not gripe many of the long-tailed gentry that frequent the holes and corners of old houses."

"Assuredly, sire," replied Cecil, gravely.

"Do ye not think it's better," continued the King, "for him to go quietly and secretly to work, peering into this hole, and that, and catching a beast here, and a beast there, and baiting his traps artificially with a piece of cheese, or a piece of bacon, as the case may be, without even whispering in the cat's ear to take care where she puts her paws?"

"Beyond all doubt, sire," answered Cecil, "that is the most expedient course."

"Well, man, well," cried James, bursting into a fit of laughter; "I am the rat-catcher, and by this time, I trust, I have gotten all the brutes safe in the trap."

Practised as Cecil was in the ways of a court, powerful as was his command over his own countenance, he could not refrain from an expression of some surprise, not unmingled with curiosity, as to the monarch's meaning. As the intention of James, however, was evidently to astonish him, the courtier may have perhaps displayed even more than he felt, when he exclaimed aloud, "Your Majesty fills me with wonder—I cannot tell what you mean."

"We will tell thee, we will tell thee," cried James; "we will expound the matter, my good lord secretary. Here is a list of certain gentlemen," and he produced a paper, not the most cleanly in appearance, which he proceeded to

read, saying, "The Lord Cobham, the Lord Grey de Wilton, Sir Walter Raleigh, Knight, Sir Griffin Markham, Sir Edward Parham, both knights, Master George Brooke, Master Copely, Fathers Watson and Clarke. There's a goodly list, containing some of the most ill-ordered men in the kingdom. Two popish priests, a puritan, an atheist, three or four free-thinkers and libertines, and all traitors. Now, if God have any mercy left for this poor realm of ours, all these rats, man, are by this time in the Tower, by virtue of a warrant under our hand, dispatched yesterday evening at four of the clock."

"I can scarcely believe my ears, sire," exclaimed Cecil. "How might your Majesty's wisdom discover this affair?"

"Ay, that's a secret, man; that's a secret," cried the King, "and by —" and he used one of his usual blasphemous oaths of a very terrible and disgusting sort, "I will never tell how I discovered it. But it is just so, Cecil; and had this girl not thought fit to let us know the treasonable practices of these men towards her, she might have brought suspicion on herself. You see, my Lord, that this letter of the Lord Cobham is dated the evening before last, at five, post meridian. Now she could not well get it till this morning."

"I found her in great tribulation, sire," said William Seymour, "and she said she was glad to find a messenger she could trust. Master George Brooke, too, whom your Majesty has just named, called while I was there, but the Lady Arabella refused to see him, and sent him away with a short answer."

"Ha!" exclaimed the King, "she should not have done that, she should have admitted him to her presence, given him soft words, and lured him gently to display all his evil intentions and secret machinations."

"Perhaps, sire," said William Seymour, with more respect in his tone than he really felt in his heart, "she might think that therein she might have trenched upon your Majesty's peculiar province; for nobody I should think is so competent to carry on such a keen and subtle investigation as yourself."

Cecil gave a sharp glance at him, to see if he felt the keen satire of his own speech, or if, on the contrary, he had uttered it in simplicity. William Seymour's face, however, was perfectly calm and grave; and the King, according to his custom, took nothing but the complimentary part to himself.

"True, sir, true," he cried, "a very discreet observa-

tion, and doubtless the young lady judged rightly in leaving the matter in our hands. We are, it must be confessed, not insignificantly astute in discovering the designs of conspirators. We have had, to our sorrow, much experience in such matters, our good people of Scotland being a somewhat unruly and self-willed race, with very little reverence for anything, especially for kings, though they should know that a monarch, being anointed of the Lord, is, in fact, God's Vicegerent on earth, to whom all men owe obedience and honour."

Scymour merely bowed his head; but Cecil enlarged upon the theme, and expressed without any reservation his wish that people would a little more consider whence the authority of kings was derived.

"Wait a little, wait a little," cried James, "we will indoctrinate them, and, if there be any sense left in the world, will show them from Scripture on what the prerogative of a monarch is founded. And so, Cecil, I can see you would fain know whence came our information regarding this plot—Ye'll never divine, man. It's a secret for our own keeping. But this much I'll tell ye, that it came from neither an Englishman nor a Scot, a Frenchman nor an Italian, a Spaniard nor a Hollander. Now go to and con your riddle."

"It is beyond my capacity, sire," replied Cecil, "and it only remains for me to inquire what your Majesty would have further done."

"They must all be tried, man; they must all be tried," said King James; "but the plague being still in London, we will have them brought to Winchester. Though it may be as well to have the man called Markham and the two priests fetched hither; for we would fain ask our fair cousin Arabella whether they are the men she saw in Cambridgeshire."

"May not that be better done at the trial, sire?" asked Cecil, who would fain have prevented the King, if possible, from stepping out of the usual course of proceeding.

"No, no, man," cried James, "we will have it so. A little preliminary investigation by ourselves will save the lawyers a great deal of trouble. And you, sir," he continued, addressing William Scymour, "as you have behaved yourself very discreetly in this affair, shall go over on the Wednesday morning,—was it not Wednesday we said?—with another gentleman, to escort the Lady Arabella to our court. What, sir, you do not look pleased!"

William Scymour, who, to say truth, was only displeased

at having any one else joined with him in the commission, immediately replied, "I am here only to obey your Majesty's command, and am always well pleased to do so."

"That is right, sir, that is right," said the King; "always act as wisely as you have done in this, and you shall have advancement;—you may now retire."

Seymour gladly obeyed the monarch's commands; for though he was of a loyal race and disposition, it was very difficult to keep up a remembrance of what is always due to a monarch for his very office's sake, in the presence of one whose character as well as his demeanour, whose acts as well as his person, had so little in them to secure respect. He had pleasant anticipations before him, however; and the rest of the evening was passed in thinking of the sweet task appointed for the following Wednesday, or in building airy structures, with the aid of those master architects, Hope and Imagination.

Alas! how often does it happen that the events to which we look forward with the brightest expectations, which seem to our eyes full of coming joy, are fraught with sorrow and disaster! We must not exactly say, that the day to which Seymour stretched the longing eyes of love and hope proved the most unfortunate in his life, for such was not the case. There was a far darker and more fatal one beyond; but still the events it brought forth were amongst the most unpleasant which had yet befallen him in life.

The morning of that Wednesday dawned brightly; the sky was clear and serene; there was sufficient air to refresh the traveller as he rode along; and William Seymour, followed by his own servants, and accompanied by Sir Lewis Lewkenor, who held the office of master of the ceremonies at the King's court, proceeded at a quick pace to the temporary residence of the Lady Arabella Stuart.

They found her dressed and waiting for them, her servants all prepared, and her own horse saddled, and at the door. She could not refrain from greeting Seymour with more warmth than a mere stranger; and, to say the truth, her countenance fell a little at the sight of his companion; for she had hoped that they might enjoy, during their two hours' ride, some of that private conversation which they had now but too few opportunities of obtaining. Sir Lewis, perhaps, remarked this difference of manner towards himself and Seymour, with whom he had been giving himself some airs of importance as they came along, to which the young gentleman, occupied with his own thoughts, had paid but little attention. The knight, at all events, chose the moment of their departure for the

display of his official consequence; and when Arabella, after taking leave of her aunt, approached the side of her horse, in order to mount, he advanced as of right to assist her. But Seymour took one step forward between him and the lady, and, with a light and easy hand, lifted her at once to the saddle.

"Sir, I do not understand what you mean by this!" exclaimed Sir Lewis: "you take too much upon yourself, and forget that it is my right to place the lady on her horse, as one of the chief officers of his Majesty's household."

Seymour turned towards him with a look of surprise, not unmingled with anger and scorn.

"It is you who forget yourself, Sir Lewis Lewkenor," he replied: "pray remember to whom you speak, and do not forget that you are but a petty gentleman, somewhat honoured by the King, but not fitted to put yourself upon a par with the old nobility of this realm."

"Sir," exclaimed the knight, in a fierce tone, which he strove in vain to moderate, "it is on the rights of my office that I stand; and I tell you that you have done what you ought not to have done, even had you been a much more important person than you are or ever will be."

"The question of the rights of your office, sir," answered Seymour, "will easily be settled by a reference to his Majesty. In regard to my own station, I should think I lowered it, even by bringing it into comparison with Sir Lewis Lewkenor. But to end this dispute, as you must see it is painful to the lady, let me say that to me first the King assigned the task of escorting her to Wilton; and I should be neglecting my duty to myself and forgetting that the same blood runs in my veins and those of his Majesty, as well as showing myself wanting in respect to him who gave me the commission, if I yielded precedence to any simple knight.—If you think I do wrong, you can report the case to his Majesty."

While he had been speaking, he had put his foot in the stirrup; and now, springing into the saddle, he placed himself on Arabella's right. The lady paused a moment for Sir Lewis to mount, and the whole party then issued forth from the gates. For about two miles they continued in the same order, Seymour speedily forgetting the little dispute that had occurred, and talking at first gravely, but after a time more gaily, with Arabella; while Sir Lewis Lewkenor, on her left, maintained a sombre and angry silence, working himself up into fury at the indignity which he supposed was put upon him.

At length, however, he suddenly brought round his horse, pushed it violently between that of Seymour and the lady's jennet, and exclaimed, "My post is on the right, sir; and I will not give it up to any man—though he be the grandson of a saucy Earl, who once well nigh lost his head for his presumption."

Seymour's eyes flashed fire; and he had seized the bridle of the knight's horse, when Arabella interposed. "I beseech—I entreat!" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Seymour, do not show yourself so intemperate as this person, who certainly strangely forgets himself, to do such things in my presence."

William Seymour was calm in a moment. The angry light passed away from his eyes; he let go the bridle of Sir Lewis Lewkenor's horse, and turning his own rein, rode round upon Arabella's left hand. A painful pause of a few minutes then succeeded; but, after a slight effort, the lover mastered the feelings of indignation in his heart, and resumed his conversation with her he loved, gradually returning to the easy and unconstrained tone in which he had before been speaking; so that the lady fancied he would easily forget all the offence which had been given. Women's hearts are generally forgiving, except on one or two points; and they are ever inclined to believe that those of men are equally placable with their own. It is, perhaps, a happy error, and yet it is a great one. William Seymour felt himself insulted; and he was not one to pass over an insult, though he might forget an injury.

The ride onward, on his part, passed in perfect tranquillity; while, on the side of Sir Lewis Lewkenor, nought was displayed but that silent and dogged sullenness, which rarely fails to mark the conduct of one who feels that he has been both wrong and disagreeable.

They at length reached the splendid mansion of Wilton, to which their steps were directed, and Seymour, springing from his horse, lifted Arabella from the saddle. Their angry companion did not interfere, but bowed low as she turned to depart; while Seymour kissed her hand, with the admitted gallantry of the time, and followed her to the door, as if he were going to enter with her. The moment he saw her within the hall, and led forward by the royal servants, however, he turned hastily upon his steps, and approached Sir Lewis Lewkenor, who was talking to one of the grooms.

"I must have the honour of speaking to you for a moment, sir," he said with a low inclination of the head.

The knight looked somewhat surprised, but followed him to a little distance, and then paused, demanding in a much more placable tone, "What is it, Mr. Seymour?"

"Simply, sir," replied the young gentleman, "that you must be aware such conduct as you have displayed towards me this day must be accounted for."

"I protest, sir," replied the knight, "that I have stood but upon the prerogative of my office; and of that his Majesty must decide."

"Certainly," replied Seymour, "but you have also used words with which the King can have no concern. You termed me the grandson of a saucy Earl, who had once nearly lost his head for his presumption. The man who used such terms was a liar; and the man who ventures to be insolent under the protection of a lady's presence, but shrinks from the weight of what he has said when she is gone, is a coward. I trust, sir, you are not of the latter class, and I maintain you to be of the former! It will, therefore, become you to follow me, if you have no urgent business that may detain you."

Sir Lewis Lewkenor was by no means a timid man; and though perhaps he would have given not a little to have been able with propriety to retract his words, yet the false laws of honour would not permit him to do so; and he consequently replied, "I am with you, sir; but perhaps you are unaware, that any one who draws a sword within the precincts of the royal residence, subjects himself to severe punishment."

"I am fully aware of the fact," replied William Seymour; "and I neither intend to expose you nor myself to such consequences; but a short walk after our long ride will do us no harm; and if you do not object, we will retread our steps towards a solitary oak, which you may remember we passed but now. It is beyond the limits, I think; and though I must certainly apologize for the trouble I give you, in making so long an excursion, I trust you will forgive me, seeing that I have no choice."

"Well, sir, well! I will not disappoint you," said the knight. "It is certainly beyond the precincts of the court, and I am with you when you please."

"I will accompany you this moment," replied Seymour; "we shall be missed if we stay long,—my sword, I think, is somewhat shorter than yours; so that there is no advantage on my side."

"Nor any on mine," answered the knight. "Shall we go on foot or on horseback?"

"On foot, by all means," replied Seymour; "our beasts are too much exhausted to do good service. Will you walk? I am ready."

"Your most humble servant," answered Sir Lewis; and with these courteous words, they set out side by side, forbidding the servants to follow, and taking their way towards the oak-tree Seymour had mentioned, with every appearance of amity and good-will upon their countenances.

CHAPTER XII.

IN the great drawing-room of Lord Pembroke's house at Wilton sat the King and Queen of England, offering a strange contrast to each other, both in person and manners; she, in the beauty, grace, and suavity, for which she was famous, and which won the hearts of her husband's people; and he, in the ungainly ugliness, awkwardness, and pride, which regal state only served to render more prominent and remarkable. They were surrounded by a brilliant court, though not a very ample one; for the fears entertained of the plague, which was then raging in England, induced the monarch to keep at a distance a great number of the principal nobles of the land. But the taste of the Queen for splendour, and the love of the King for fine clothing, not on his own person, but on his favourites, ensured that the most costly stuffs and the richest hues should be displayed around him, as if for a contrast to his own slovenly and ill-fashioned garments.

With all her popular qualities, Anne of Denmark had, as is well known, not only a strong, but a somewhat passionate spirit; and there was a heightened spot in her fair cheek which showed to those who knew her, that something had gone wrong between her husband and herself. Nothing had, indeed, occurred in public to indicate what was the occasion of quarrel, for the court was merely assembled to receive the address of some neighbouring town, the King having been induced to admit the deputation, not without much persuasion and argument.

His demeanour to the worthy mayor and aldermen had been cold and repulsive, while that of Anne had been full of gracious condescension and kindness. The King had made an harangue after his style, in which he set forth the rights

of kings, and dwelt much more upon his own authority and dignity, than upon the loyalty of his people generally, or that of the corporation before him in particular; and the deputation retired, delighted with the manners and appearance of the Queen, but somewhat sick and disgusted with his Majesty, and utterly at a loss to know what he meant by the long disquisition into which he had entered.

The moment they were gone, James began to fidget in his seat, looked twice round to the face of Arabella Stuart, who stood on the left hand of the Queen's chair, and then gave a nod to one of the gentlemen of the bedchamber, saying, in a low voice, "Now, bring them in, bring them in."

"I wonder what nonsense is to be enacted now!" said Anne of Denmark, addressing Arabella in a whisper, and in the Italian tongue, which, notwithstanding her northern extraction, she spoke much more fluently than English. "The King has some surprise in store—he is too fond of this stage effect."

"I really do not know," replied Arabella, whose cheek was pale, and her voice faint. "I hope and trust he is not going to enter upon the affairs of that unfortunate quarrel, which I mentioned to your Majesty. I fear it may be so, for he insisted upon my being present to-day, though I felt unwell, and little equal to the task. Neither do I see Sir Lewis Lewkenor nor Mr. Seymour present."

"We shall soon know," answered the Queen; "but don't be alarmed, poor child; I'll quiet the matter. But who are these they are bringing in? No, this is some other affair."

As she spoke, two officers, with several halberdiers, entered the room, escorting three men, evidently prisoners; for though their limbs were at liberty, they wore neither sword nor dagger, as was customary for all gentlemen in those days, while before and after each walked an armed soldier of the guard.

"There, there!" cried the King, "bring them not too near—that will do; let them stand there. Show your faces, sirs, so that this lady may see them. Now, Lady Arabella, look at these men well, and tell me if any of them were amongst those who accompanied the Baron de Mardyke—whom you once told me of, and who has since fled from England—when he began broaching to you treason, at a time when we had scarce crossed the border to take possession of the throne, which descended to us by hereditary right. Why, what ails the lassie? She's as white as a Holland sheet, and shaking like a man in an ague!"

"Oh, sire, I do beseech you!" exclaimed Arabella, "do not force me to become a witness against any of these misguided men. I did hope and trust that, in dealing openly with your Majesty, as in duty bound, and in concealing nothing, even when it seemed to me trifling, which affected your Majesty's sacred rights, you would spare me, and not force me to take any further part in matters that might doom them to death. Surely, your Majesty's own wisdom and judgment are sufficient to condemn or exculpate them, without my having any share in it."

As she spoke, she held her eyes resolutely down, while Sir Griffin Markham, who stood in the front, fixed on her a keen and anxious glance, knowing how much it would aggravate his crime, if it could be proved that he was the very first to move in the treason, for which he was now a prisoner, and that he had twice put himself forward to oppose the King's title to the crown.

"Nonsense!" cried the King; "we must first know the truth, madam, before we can judge of it. Look at them this minute, I say. We have examined them ourselves this morning, and must hear whether their story be true. What are you afraid of?"

"She is afraid, to be sure," said Anne of Denmark, interposing, "of being called hereafter into a rude court of justice, questioned by brutal lawyers, exposed to the gaze of the rabble, and all those things to which a lady of her rank and age ought not to be subjected."

"If that be all," said Cecil, taking a step forward, "I know his Majesty does not propose that the Lady Arabella should be called as a witness on the trial; and, of course, to satisfy his Majesty upon the point in question, here in private, she can have no hesitation. The King will not be satisfied," he added, in a low tone, to Anne of Denmark, while James called one of the ushers to him, and made him arrange the prisoners in a line—"the King will not be satisfied without an answer; and the sooner this scene is over the better."

"Now look at the men, lady," said James, as soon as he saw that the culprits were disposed according to his pedantic notions of regularity, "and answer my question."

"I did not hear it rightly, sire," answered Arabella, still hesitating and trembling.

"Then you should make better use of your luggs," cried the monarch, sharply. "I told you to look at these three men, and say whether you saw either of them with the Baron de Mardyke, who has fled from England, what time he held some conversation with you in Cambridgeshire;

for I find by faithful witnesses that they were all in those parts about that time."

Arabella raised her eyes timidly, and gazed at the three prisoners, while Sir Griffin Markham turned as pale as death, and the two priests looked sternly down upon the ground. The lady's eyes first turned upon Watson, and then upon Clarke, the latter of whom had, indeed, been at the inn on the occasion referred to. Being one of those, however, who had remained behind in the kitchen, while she had conversed with the knight in the next room, and had sat with his back towards her, as she passed out again, the glance she had had of his features was very slight. She then turned towards Markham, and her heart beat quick when she recognised the person who had assumed the name of the Baron de Mardyke. Immediately after, however, the terms of the King's question came back to her mind, and though her pure, high heart dreaded the thought of prevarication, she did not feel herself bound to do more than answer it exactly as it stood.

"I do not see any one, sire," she replied, after a moment's consideration, "who I can be sure was with the Baron de Mardyke on the occasion to which your Majesty refers. Two of their faces I have seen somewhere before, but——"

"Come, come," cried the King, interrupting her; "we must have a clearer answer, Mistress Arabel. Take them one by one. Stand forward, Father Watson—though why we should call you Father, I don't know. Now, lady, is this man one of them?"

"I never saw his face before," replied Arabella.

"Now, Father Clarke," continued the King, "it's your turn now;" and as the priest came forward, James turned his eyes to Arabella's face.

"Somewhere I have seen this gentleman," she said, after gazing at him attentively; "but I do not by any means know that it was there—it might have been anywhere else as well."

The King looked dissatisfied, and lolled his tongue about in his mouth.

"Now, Sir Griffin Markham," he cried; and at the sound of his name Arabella started with a feeling of relief, while the King turned to her, inquiring, "Well, what do you say to him?"

Arabella gazed on him steadfastly, and then replied, "In this case I am quite sure, sire, that this gentleman, who you say is Sir Griffin Markham, was not with the Baron de Mardyke at that time."

The lips of the prisoner moved without giving utterance

to any sound, but he said in his heart, "If I live, lady, I will not forget your conduct this day, and will repay it."

Arabella felt her heart sink; for though what she said was literally true, yet it was calculated to mislead; and she loved not to do so, even to save a fellow-creature's life.

"There, take them away, take them away," cried the King, disappointed; for he had fancied that his skill and dexterity had puzzled out a connection between the schemes formerly revealed to him by his fair cousin, and those in which Lord Cobham had been lately engaged. "Away with them! away with them!—and now we will proceed to that other business."

"I beseech you, sir," said Anne of Denmark, as the prisoners were removed from the room, "to suffer me and these ladies to retire, if you have any more such matters to inquire into. They neither please nor befit us; and our fair cousin here is not so well as to endure such things with safety."

"Ay, but she must stay—she must stay," cried the King; "for this is a matter regarding which she only can speak. Call Mr. Seymour here, and Sir Lewis Lewkenor. We must hear how all this befel."

"I beseech you, sire, let me go," said Arabella. "I have been frightened and agitated already this morning, by the quarrel of these gentlemen. I have been also agitated by the questions your Majesty has asked. I have told you all that occurred."

"No, no, that won't do," cried James; "you must repeat it here in order."

"Then let me do so, sire, at once," said Arabella. "The first dispute was, which should place me on my horse; and Mr. Seymour having done so, Sir Lewis reproached him for taking what he called his place, saying that his office in your Majesty's court entitled him to it. Mr. Seymour replied, however, that your commands to escort me were first given to him: that his rank, and the fact of his bearing in his veins the same blood as your Majesty, however distantly, gave him precedence over any simple knight, and that he should think he was wanting even in duty to you if he did not take upon him the post which you had assigned him."

"Well, what more, what more?" cried the King, just as William Seymour, followed by an usher, entered the drawing-room, and approached the circle. "There were after words, I think?"

"But few, sire," replied Arabella, the warm blood coming up into her cheek; "Mr. Seymour rode for some

way on my right hand, while Sir Lewis on the left seemed sullen and discontented. At length, however, he came round and insisted that Mr. Seymour should give up that place to him."

"There he was wrong," cried the King; "there he was wrong. What more, lady?"

"Really, I cannot justly tell, sire," replied Arabella; "I was much frightened, and not a little displeased; and after some sharp words between the two gentlemen, Mr. Seymour yielded, I think out of pity to me, and came to the other side."

"There he was right," said James. "But where is Sir Lewis Lewkenor? Have you called him, usher?"

"He is in bed, your Majesty," said the other, "and humbly begged your Majesty would excuse him."

"In bed?" exclaimed the King; "why, what ails him? He has not got the plague, has he?"

"No, your Majesty," replied the usher; "he's somewhat badly wounded in the shoulder."

"I found myself bound, sire," said William Seymour, taking a step forward, "to punish a personage who thought fit to use towards me words unbecoming a gentleman to give or to receive; and who had, moreover, paid no respect either to my rank or station, to my distant relationship to your Majesty, or to your own will in naming me the first to escort the Lady Arabella hither."

"And so ye have fought?" cried the King, opening his large eyes, and gaping upon him with his mouth, as if in utter astonishment; "and so ye have fought?—My truly! ye are a graceless pack; and if ye have drawn your swords within the precincts of our court, ye shall both suffer accordingly."

"No sire," replied Seymour; "we took care not so to offend. But immediately on our return, we went beyond the park walls to a spot about a mile and a half distant, and there ended our quarrel as became us."

"Became you?" cried the King; "I'd have you to know, that nothing of the kind becomes you at all—I will have a stop put to such things, and no more bickering, and quarrelling, and taking to the strong hand in my dominions. As ye punished him, as ye call it, I'll punish you, and banish you from our realm, not to return till our pleasure. Ye take much upon you, sir, on the strength of a very distant relationship to ourselves; ye set great store by a small matter."

"No small matter, sire, in my eyes, to be ever so distantly related to your Majesty," replied the young gentle-

man, who, though grieved and indignant, was anxious it possible to conciliate the King, and obtain a reversal of his sentence.

"That's not ill-spoken, sir," answered James; "but, nevertheless, we will have you take the air of the continent for a couple of years; the warmer climate may suit your warm blood, and when we have sure proof that it has grown cooler, we will let you come back again, but not before; for we are resolved that such strife shall no longer go on."

William Seymour stood before the King for a moment without reply. There was, indeed, an answer springing to his lips; that it was not in the power of any King, by his mere word, to banish a British subject from the land of his birth. But he recollected that by such conduct he might blast all his own dearest hopes for ever; that there were means, too, within the reach of those in authority to change the fate which seemed to await him even for a worse; and in the mood which apparently reigned throughout the whole court and kingdom, the King's will, he feared, would be taken for law.

A hope, too, might enter into his breast, that by using the influence of his family and friends he might shake the monarch's decision; and, amongst the multitude of hurrying thoughts that crossed his mind, during the single moment that he stood there silent, there came a sweet, delusive dream, full of romance and love,—for it could not be called a plan,—which made him fancy that, under some circumstances, his exile might be converted into the brightest of blessings.

After a brief pause, then, he bowed and retired, thinking that he caught upon the countenance of Cecil a slight smile, as if the minister were not altogether displeased at the course which events had taken, but unable to comprehend whence arose the enmity which that look betrayed.

CHAPTER XIII.

With a pale cheek, and a faint heart, and limbs from which all strength seemed gone, Arabella followed the Queen when she rose, and with slow steps accompanied Anne of Denmark to the door of her own apartments. There, with a low reverence, she left her, and hurried back to her own chamber, where, sinking on her knees by the side of the bed, she gave way to a violent burst of tears.

She did not perceive that any one was in the room, but the moment after, she heard something move, and a voice say, "Oh, lady!" and looking round she saw the girl Ida Mara, whom she had consented to receive at the entreaty of Sir Harry West.

Arabella instantly started up and tried to wipe away the tears; but the girl looked down, as if she wished not to see them flow, and said in a quiet but sad tone, "Shall I leave you, madam? I know too well that, when one is sorrowful, it is better to be alone."

"No," replied Arabella, "no, you may stay. It is but that I have been agitated by the quarrel you saw this morning between those two gentlemen, and by hearing just now that they have fought since their arrival."

"Fought?" cried the girl, eagerly; "I hope he has punished him, then."

"Which do you mean?" asked Arabella, with a sad smile.

"Oh, the tall one, with the clear open brow and gentle look," replied the girl. "The other was so insolent and rude, I could have struck him on the spot, if I had been a man."

Arabella shook her head sadly. "All do not judge as you do, Ida Mara," she replied. "Would that they did! The one who gave the offence has escaped with a wound, which perhaps may be but a scratch; the other is banished from the realm."

Ida clasped her hands vehemently over her eyes, exclaiming, "This is man's justice!—When will it come to an end!"

Arabella cast herself into a chair, and mused for a

minute or two. Her tears flowed as she thought; but at length wiping them away, she said, "Perhaps it is better. God knows how it would have ended.—Come, Ida Mara, sit down here upon this stool beside me, and let me hear your tale from your own lips. Sir Harry West has told me something of it; but I would hear more."

The girl obeyed; and sitting down at her mistress's feet, and raising her large Italian eyes to the lady's countenance, she told her little history in plain and simple language, which carried the conviction of truth along with it.

To that tale, as the reader knows it, we have little if anything to add. She recounted how miserable she had been in her own home after her mother's death, and her father's marriage to another wife; how she felt even a sort of relief when he sold her to the old English traveller; how she thought it would be a happy and a tranquil life merely to sing as she had been accustomed, and to play upon her lute; and how she soon found that it was full of sorrow, and insult, and discomfort. She told the lady, too, that when her wanderings began, the man Weston was accompanied by his wife, a very shrew who ruled him with a rod of iron, and whenever he proved the least refractory, threatened to disclose some secrets of which she seemed to have gained possession. This always had the effect of cowing him completely; but his wife had died in London, the girl said, some two months before. After this woman's death, whom Ida Mara represented as little less wicked than her husband, he sought to take advantage of the poor girl's unprotected state, not only for the gratification of his own passions, but for the purposes of gain.

"I must not say," continued Ida Mara, "all that I think he wanted me to do, for his words were dark and doubtful; but this I know, lady, that, unless the misery of life was so great that I wished it speedily to end, I would not eat of food which his hand had come near, nor drink of a cup that had been within his reach, for the world."

Arabella smiled incredulously. "Those are your Italian notions," she said; "we never hear of such things in England, Ida Mara. But now you are safe from him, and may banish fear; and if you show yourself a good girl, and are faithful to me, you shall never want a friend and a protector as long as I live."

"I will love you to my last hour," replied Ida Mara, kissing her hand, "and that good old knight, too. He is the first man who ever showed me kindness in the world,—real kindness, I mean,—kindness without guile; and I

would give my life to prove to him how grateful the poor Italian girl can be."

"I am sure you would," replied Arabella; "but now leave me, Ida Mara; and if you wish to behold the splendour of a court, go down and stand in the vestibule. You see, the King and Queen are going forth. There stand the King's horses and her Majesty's coach, for their evening airing. I am calmer now, Ida Mara; and I would fain have time to think."

The girl accordingly left her; and Arabella continued leaning her head upon her hand and gazing out of the window, without giving much note to the objects which were passing before her eyes. The expression of her countenance was sad, and yet it varied continually, without, however, becoming, even for a moment, cheertul. A smile, indeed, crossed it more than once; but that smile was so tinged with melancholy, that it afforded no indication of the rise of one hope, of the existence of one joy. The changes that passed over her beautiful face were merely signs of the rapid movement of thought and fancy; but all her ideas were gloomy, all her imaginations sad.

In the meanwhile, the Queen entered her carriage and drove away, the King mounted his horse, and rode out, with almost all the gentlemen of the court. Arabella gazed upon the train as it departed, and murmured to herself what she would not, knowingly, have spoken to the ears of any one, "What a sad thing it is to be a tyrant! And yet it is less dangerous to oneself, to one's realm, and to one's children, to be a fierce tyrant like Harry the Eighth, than a weak and vain one like this man.—They are very late this evening. It will be dark in an hour;" and again she fell into thought.

The course of her meditations seemed now more sad than before, for the tears rose in her bright eyes, and trembled amidst the dark lashes as if they would run over. But just as she was wiping them away, there was a slight noise at her chamber door; and, thinking it was one of her maids, she said, "Come in," without turning her head.

The next instant she started up and looked round; for she knew the step, and it was not that which she expected. She could not restrain her feelings, however, in that hour of bitter sorrow; and in another moment she was in Seymour's arms.

"Oh, William!" she cried, "how could you think of coming here?—Suppose you were discovered, what would they think? what would they say?"

"Nothing, nothing, my beloved," he replied; "you do

not yet know all the changes that our good Queen has brought into the court. She has banished all those idle ceremonies and vain restraints with which every movement was formerly shackled, and declares that she will have all Italians sent out of England, lest they should introduce those fanciful doubts and jealousies of the ladies of the land, which they entertain towards their own women.* However, sweet Arabel, if there had been lions and dragons at the door, I must have come. Do you think that I could quit my native country, and leave you for months—perhaps for years, without the sad solace of a farewell?"

"Oh, but we shall have time," cried Arabella; "surely it will not be so soon."

William Seymour shook his head. "Cecil is against me," he said, "though I know not what offence I have given; and before he rode out with the King, he came to me with a smooth face, telling me, that to mitigate the expression of his Majesty's anger, and not to let it seem that I was sent from my own country in disgrace, he had obtained the King's consent to my being appointed to the nominal embassy at one of the small Italian courts, that of Parma, but only on condition that I set out immediately. I am to leave Wilton this very night."

"This is indeed, cruel!" cried Arabella; and the tears ran rapidly from her eyes, while William Seymour held both her hands in his, and gazed upon that fair but sorrowful face with looks of love and deep emotion.

"It is, indeed, cruel," he said, "and no less cruel than unjust. But what can I do, Arabella?—I have no power to resist. If I refuse to go, a thousand to one I find my way into the Tower. Pretences are never wanting in these days, and the liberty of Englishmen seems but to have become an idle name. I care not, indeed, for quitting England. Although it be the country of my birth, and of my love, it loses all its charms for me, when I see security and right trampled under foot, and the vain name of prerogative raised above law and justice. I care not for quitting England; but to quit Arabella is anguish indeed. My enemies do not know all that they inflict upon me, or they would rejoice, even more than they do."

"Is there no way to prevent it?" exclaimed Arabella. "Will not your grandfather interfere?"

"The King has not yet received him at the court," replied Seymour; "and it was thought a great mark of grace

* She made use of very nearly the same expressions herself to Cardinal Bentivoglio.

that I was permitted to attend upon him here at Wilton.—No, no, Arabella; there is but one way of preventing our separation.”

“Is there one?” cried Arabella, eagerly. “Oh! take it then, Seymour, take it.”

“Nay, it is you must take it, sweetest,” he replied. “’Tis that Arabella goes with me—that she flies with him she loves, from this hated court. Nay, turn not pale, beloved, or I shall fear to urge all the arguments which love has ready to persuade you. Here, seat you here, dear Arabella, and listen. I know all that it is I ask of you. I know the sacrifice, the great sacrifice that is required.”

“It is not that, Seymour,” she said, earnestly; “what sacrifice should I think too great to make you happy, and to free myself from the state of bondage in which I live?—But how, Seymour, how can we fly?” continued Arabella; “the moment the Queen returns, most likely she will send for me. Nothing is prepared. We should be caught, and brought back again with shame.”

“Oh! not to-night, dear one,” replied William Seymour, “but if you consent, the matter is quite easy. You will, you will, Arabella! The joy of that hope nearly turns my brain. Say, say you will!”

Arabella bent down her glowing face upon his shoulder, but gave no reply except by silence; and Seymour, drawing her closer to him, strove to banish the doubts and tears which he knew would arise before her imagination, at the thought of the rash enterprise he proposed.

“Listen, dearest, listen,” he said, “and you will see it is all fair and feasible. The court goes to London in three days for the ceremony of the coronation. As many persons will be left out of the procession, on account of the plague, you must feign great apprehensions. They will easily let you go back into Cambridgeshire to your aunt Emily’s. I, in the meantime, must hasten to London, where I will make preparations; for I cannot go upon an embassy without some sort of splendour. When all is ready I will let you know; and sailing away from London, will anchor my ship in the Thames’ mouth, opposite the small town of Leigh. An easy journey by Chelmsford will bring you near the shore, where a boat will be waiting for you night and day. Then sailing away together, long ere any one knows that you have departed, we shall be safe, beyond pursuit, and linked together for life by that sweet and blessed bond which confirms and sanctifies the contract of two hearts that love. Is not this easy, Arabella? Where

is the difficulty? Long ere the news can reach the capital, we shall be across the sea; and my going from London alone will render it weeks, perhaps months, a matter of doubt what has become of you. See you any obstacle, dearest? Is there any danger?"

"I know not," answered Arabella, "I know not; and yet I doubt and fear. But hark! They are come back again. There comes the Queen's coach. Leave me, Seymour, leave me—oh, in pity, leave me!"

"Will you, then, dearest—will you?" he cried; hastily; "I cannot leave you till you say you will."

"Yes, yes," she answered; "I will do anything to make you happy;" and catching her to his bosom for a moment, he took one embrace, and left her.

The agony of parting is with those that remain. The changing scene, the hurry of preparation, the bustle of the journey, the incidents on the road, the very excitement of action, are all causes of diversion from sadder thoughts; and though every hour, nay, every moment, Seymour's mind reverted to Arabella, the difference was, that through the live-long day she sat and dwelt upon no other image but his. Yet her fancies were as chequered as the light and shade of the grim foliage in the sunshine; and for many an hour her thoughts wandered, first to dark pictures of danger and difficulty, discovery and disappointment; and then, with trembling hope, glanced towards the brighter scene, and she drew for herself airy sketches of escape, and freedom, and love, and joy. But in all that her imagination called up, Seymour was by her side, sharing the peril, and so rendering it doubly terrible, or partaking the happiness, and making it more intensely bright.

CHAPTER XIV.

It may be doubted whether Arabella Stuart would have played her part well, in feigning apprehensions that she did not experience, regarding the plague which was then raging in London; for by nature she was not a dissembler, and the very quickness of her feelings and of her imagination would have made her fearful at every turn lest the deceit should be discovered. But luckily she was saved the trouble of assuming anything. The agitation and ap-

prehensions that she felt whenever her mind turned to the fulfilment of her promise to Mr. Seymour; the emotion, the anxiety, the fear, could not be concealed from the eyes of those who surrounded her; but, as she had shared her secret with no one, the principal persons of the court, as well as the Queen herself, attributed the whole to terror at the idea of the plague, and Anne of Denmark was the first to propose that she should take no part at the coronation.

Arabella gladly caught at the offer, and asked the royal permission to cross the country into Cambridgeshire, and to take up her residence at the house where she had lately spent much of her time, till the coronation was over, and the court once more in an uninfected place. Permission was readily given; and, as it was evident to the Queen that her young cousin's health had somewhat suffered, one of the royal coaches was appointed to convey her to the place of her destination. All these arrangements were made on the day preceding the removal of the court to London; and Arabella retired to her chamber to meditate upon her future plans.

"In whom shall I confide?" she thought; "my girl Marian, though faithful and true, is herself about to wed the man of her choice; doubtless she would go with me if I asked her, but it were cruel to put her attachment towards me to such a test. Ida Mara?" she continued; "I think the girl is honest and good—I am sure she is; there is something in her manner, and even in her look, that cannot deceive one. Yet I have known her but a short time. She has no tie to me, and perhaps it were rash to trust her. Nevertheless, I must either tell Marian my secret, or send her home. She is jealous of the Italian girl, that is clear; and perhaps it were better to leave her by the way, at her own parents' house, as she is to become a wife, it seems, in three weeks. Then I must see what can be done. I will watch Ida Mara keenly. My old and faithful servant Adams I can trust, at all events—he will go with me to the death. But I must conceal my plans from Emily Cavendish—she is too light and giddy to be confided in, though she would not injure me for the world."

The morning was somewhat dull and showery when the Lady Arabella, with her two maids, entered the coach which was to convey them into Cambridgeshire. To Marian she had already communicated her purpose of leaving her at her father's house as they passed, and had, according to the good old custom, added to the girl's dower as large a marriage present as her own somewhat scantily furnished purse could afford.

"As we go, Ida Mara," she said, "we will stop for one night at good Sir Harry West's, if he be yet returned, so that you may see your friend and benefactor; and if he be not returned as yet, he will doubtless soon come over to see us when he does come back."

As Arabella expected, the poor girl's eyes were instantly lighted up with joy; and, in her eager Italian manner, she declared that she would go down upon her knees to him, and kiss his hand a thousand times, for having befriended her in the hour of need, and placed her with a lady whom she could love so well. The girl Marian listened with somewhat of a curling lip; and, though she did not venture to make any comment aloud, in her heart she called the poor Italian's warm expressions of gratitude and attachment "nothing but flattery and servility."

It was about five o'clock on the evening of the following day that, after having deposited the girl Marian safely at her father's house, the carriage containing Arabella wound up the little road which led to the mansion of Sir Harry West. Passing by the garden gate, it proceeded to the great doors; and there the bell was rung; but for some minutes no one came to answer its summons. At length old Lakyn and another man appeared, and if Arabella had remarked their faces, she would have seen that both were somewhat grave. But she took no heed to their looks, and merely said, "Sir Harry has returned, I suppose. Is he within?"

"Yes, lady," replied Lakyn, "he is within. He has not been out all day; for he feels somewhat unwell."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Arabella, in a grieved tone. "Is he in bed?"

"No, my lady, he is in the hall," answered Lakyn.

"Oh, then, I will go and try to cheer him," replied the lady. "Come, Ida Mara, it will do him good to hear that you are happy with me;" and stepping out of the carriage, followed by the girl, with a light step, she walked quickly along the passage before the servants, and opened the door of the old hall.

Though it was the month of July, a large fire was blazing in the chimney; and seated beside it, with his head resting on his hand, appeared Sir Harry West, wrapped in a large cloak of sables. His face was very pale, and his eyes bright and fiery, with a dark line beneath them. The heaviness of severe sickness was evidently upon him; but the moment the Lady Arabella appeared, he started up and took a step or two towards her, then paused and said, "Lakyn, you should not have done this. Dear lady, I am ill!—Do not come too near. It may be infectious."

"Oh, I am not afraid," replied Arabella, advancing and taking his hand, which felt dry and burning. "What is the matter, dear Sir Harry?" she continued; "we have come to comfort and console you."

"Nay, nay," cried the knight, drawing his hand quickly away, and retreating a step: "I cannot have you stay here, dear lady. Through a long life I have never felt as I feel now; and I fear that this may be even worse than it seems. You must go on with all speed; and stop not at the village; the landlord of the inn is lying sick—of the plague, they tell me. I saw him the day before yesterday, and he was then past hope."

"He is dead, sir," said Lakyn, who had lingered at the door; "I wish to Heaven you would take some antidote!"

"I will, I will," replied Sir Harry West; "but you must hurry away, lady. I will not have you stay a minute longer. They say the disease is not so infectious till the spots appear. Of that, I am still free, thank God, for your sake; but you must away at once. I beseech you, not another word."

Arabella turned towards the door; but ere she reached it, Ida Mara caught her hand and kissed it, saying, "I must stay with him, lady!—He was the first that ever befriended me on earth.—I cannot, I cannot leave him!"

"Good girl!" cried Arabella.

"She must not stay—she shall not!" exclaimed Sir Harry West. "I beseech you, madam, take her with you."

But Ida Mara darted back, and kneeling before him, cast her arms round him, exclaiming, "Here I will stay! Now send me with her if you will, to carry the infection with me."

"Ah! my poor girl," exclaimed the old man, putting his hand upon her head, while the tears rose in his eyes, "you know not what you do."

"I do—I do!" cried Ida Mara, kissing his hand; "for whom could I give my life so well as you?—But God will protect me, never fear; and I will save you, too."

"Well, lady," said Sir Harry West, sinking into his chair again, "I suppose, if you will consent, she *must* stay now; but I do beseech you go yourself as quickly as may be—God send it be not too late already. Go, pray go—"

"I will," said Arabella; "and may Heaven protect and restore you, Sir Harry. I will go, though I do feel that this poor girl's devotion is almost a reproach to me. However, fare you well; I fear I ought not to risk my life, although Heaven knows I wish it were at an end."

Thus saying, she retired and re-entered the carriage,

which was soon turned, and on its way to the house of the Lady Emily Cavendish. After driving on for an hour or two, night fell, and Arabella, alone in the vehicle, gave herself up to melancholy thoughts.

"This is a dreadful disease," she said to herself—"a dreadful disease, indeed; so fierce in its nature, that few who approach the sick escape the contagion, and few who are once stricken ever cast off the malady. It is so easily conveyed, too—I wonder if Emily will receive me. It is hardly right to carry the danger to her house,—with all her children too,—and I know she dreads it terribly. I may have it upon me at this moment;" and she asked herself, What if it were so? Her frame was weakened, her spirits depressed by all the grief and anxiety she had lately gone through; and care and apprehension took possession of her entirely, as the carriage rolled slowly on, through the darkness of the night. The horses were tired, the coachman somewhat sullen at being disappointed of his expected place of repose, so that the journey was rendered longer in point of time than it needed to have been, by the dullness of both man and beast. Arabella grew impatient, anxious, heated, her head began to ache violently, her lips grew dry; and again she asked herself, "What if I have caught the disease?"

At length, at the little village of St. Neot's, the coachman stopped at the door of a clean-looking little inn, saying that he must water his horses, though the mansion towards which their steps were directed was within five miles. Arabella, descending from the vehicle, entered the house; and being known to the people of the place, she was received with all the reverence due to her station.

"Bless me, madam," said the landlady, as she led her to her chamber up stairs, "you do not look well!"

"I am fatigued," replied Arabella, "and have so violent a headache, that I think I shall stay here for the night. Pray call my servant, Adams, to me, and bid him bring the paper-case which lies upon the seat of the carriage."

As soon as the man appeared, Arabella told him that she had determined to remain there the night, but that he must ride on with a note to Lady Emily, and bring her back an answer. She then, in a few brief lines, explained to her cousin that she had been in a house where she feared there was a case of plague, and that not feeling well, she had stopped at the inn at St. Neot's to see what would be the result. She begged her, moreover, to send her back by the messenger any letters that might be waiting for her, and then gave the note to the man, telling him to use all speed, and return.

When he was gone, the landlady, with officious care, bustled about to provide for the comfort of her distinguished guest; but Arabella sat silent at the table, with her temples throbbing, and her heart faint. All she asked for was citron juice and water to quench her thirst; and at length the good hostess, beginning to feel alarmed, ran down to her husband, to tell him that the young lady looked very ill, and that she should not wonder if she had got the plague.

At the end of as short a space of time as it was possible to make the journey and return in, Arabella's servant came back, and, entering the room, gazed anxiously upon his fair mistress's countenance, while he said, "Here is this letter from the Lady Emily, madam, but I found a messenger waiting at the house, who would deliver his packet to none but yourself. He has come hither with me; but I fear you are not well enough to see him."

"Let him come up—let him come up," cried Arabella, eagerly; and before she had finished reading the few wild and apprehensive lines of her cousin, the stranger was in the room.

"I have charge to deliver this letter, madam, into your own hands," he said, "and to receive your answer."

Arabella took the packet and looked at the address. It was in the handwriting of William Seymour, and eagerly tearing it open, she read.

"I am driven to set out from London," he wrote, "two days before I intended; for if I stay even till Wednesday, I shall have the company of Sir George Carew forced upon me, and all our hopes are at an end. The ship will lie at Leigh all day to-morrow, and all the following night. Come then, my beloved, come with all speed, and give me back the happiness that I have not known since I left you."

Arabella pressed her hand tightly upon her brow, and gazed wildly into vacancy. Every wish of her heart induced her to fly to him. The very despairing feeling of being alone, sick, and perhaps stricken by the pestilence, made her heart yearn to seek the arms of him who loved her, and find shelter, and comfort, and gentle tendance there. "But," she asked herself, "shall I take it to him I love? Shall I carry disease and death to one for whom I would willingly sacrifice my own life? Shall any selfish longing for the blessing of his presence induce me to destroy him? Oh, no, no!"

"If you will wait below for a moment," she said, addressing the messenger, as soon as she could collect her thoughts, "I will write an answer;" and, seating herself at the table, she drew the writing materials towards her. Her brain whirled, her heart felt faint, she feared that she would

never be able to accomplish the task ; but dipping the pen in the ink, she proceeded with a hurried and unsteady hand.

"I cannot come," she said ; "otherwise nothing should induce me to break my promise, however rash that promise might be. But I cannot come, for I am ill, and unequal to the journey. Even did I feel strength enough to undertake it, I could not bear to join you ; for I have been in a house infected by the plague ; and, although I will not deny that to see you would be the greatest blessing on earth, yet I would not purchase even that blessing, at the risk of carrying the pestilence to you. Go on your way then, William, and may God bless and prosper you ! I will not tell you to forget me ; I will not tell you to remember me. Do as your heart dictates ; but believe me, in life or in death, yours, Arabella."

After she had done, she gazed at the letter for a moment, and then said to herself,

"It will alarm him—perhaps it will make him come here, and that would be his ruin ;" and, taking the pen again, she added, "Though I feel very ill, I do not think it is the plague. I am sure, indeed, it is not—there has not yet been time. Heaven bless you ! Adieu !" and bending her head over the letter, she let the tears which were in her eyes drop upon the page. Then folding and sealing it, she called the man who had brought it, and putting some money into his hand, bid him make all speed.

Without delay, he set off upon his errand, and, riding all night, reached, early the next morning, the little port of Leigh, off which the ship that bore William Seymour had been moored on the preceding evening. The ship's boat was at the shore, and the messenger, entering it without delay, was soon rowed to the vessel, where, in the cabin, waiting for him alone, he found his young master.

"The lady is very ill, sir," he said, in a low voice ; "she looked very ill, indeed."

"Ill !" exclaimed her lover, with a look full of grief and disappointment. Good Heavens ! how unfortunate !" and taking the letter, he opened it and read it. The colour left his cheek as he did so, and his hand shook with agitation. "I cannot go," he cried ; "I cannot go and leave her.—Hark you, Williams, hark you ! Quick, pack up some things in the saddle-bags.—Can I get a horse at Leigh ?"

"None but the one that brought me, sir," replied the man ; "and that is well-nigh knocked up.—We have no saddle-bags with us, sir."

"Row on shore, then," said his master. "Do the best you can to refresh your horse, and send back the boat for me. I will join you in a couple of hours. By that time he will be able to go on."

The man shook his head. "Part of the way, at least, till I can get another," added the young gentleman; "he must—he shall."

The man knew it was useless to argue, and retiring from the cabin, mounted the ladder to the deck.

William Seymour pressed his lips upon the letter again and again. "She was weeping when she wrote it," he said, gazing at the blotted page. "Dear girl, I will see thee, if it be for an hour."

But scarcely had the words passed his lips, when, through the little window in the stern, he saw one of the gilded barges of the day come rushing along with full wind and tide; and the next moment a good deal of shouting and noise was heard above. An instant after, his servant ran down, and closing the door behind him, said, "Sir George Carew is alongside, sir, asking if this is your vessel."

"Curses upon him!" cried Seymour, striking the table. "But it is not his fault, either.—It is impossible now;" and folding up the letter, he placed it in his bosom, while a number of voices were heard talking upon deck, and some steps descending the ladder.

"Stay, Williams, stay," he said; "I must write an answer to this, which you must bear back again. If you can see the lady, tell her what has happened. Tell her I was coming to see her, but,—" the door opened as he spoke, and he added, in an altered tone, "then join me at Brussels with all speed.—Ah, Carew! so you have caught me?"

"Yes, Seymour," replied Sir George, shaking him by the hand; "it was very kind of you to lay to for me all night."

"Nay," answered the young gentleman, "I cannot take credit for such courtesy. I wished much to have news of a friend who is very ill."

"Some fair lady, I will swear," replied Sir George Carew. "God send her better, Seymour; and now, as soon as my packages are in, I am ready to sail; for the King's commands are strict upon both you and me to lose no time."

"I must write a letter first," said William Seymour; "then I am yours."

The letter was written, and the servant having received it, returned to Leigh, well furnished with money for his journey. As soon as his horse was in condition to travel, he once more set out for St. Neot's, which he reached about

ten o'clock on the following morning. It was not without some apprehensions, to say the truth, that he asked for the Lady Arabella, for the suspicions which had been entertained regarding the plague had reached his ears on his former visit. The countenance of the hostess, however, was more cheerful, and the usual bustle of the inn was going on in full activity.

"She has got the doctors from Cambridge with her," replied the landlady, "and I doubt that she will see you, master, for she is to be kept very quiet, they say."

"But how goes it with her?" asked the man. "Is it as you fancied?"

"No, no, God forbid!" cried the landlady; "they say she has had poison, but not enough to kill, and she is somewhat better already."

CHAPTER XV.

WEEKS, months, and years passed away like a tale that is told; and on their passing we shall not pause, dear reader, for to say truth we should have little to relate, which in a work such as this would be pleasing to your ear. What satisfaction could you derive from pictures of a court full of venality and corruption?—What satisfaction would it be either to the writer or the reader to look into the prurieneces of the most disgusting monarch that ever sat upon the English throne? We will not, therefore, attempt to paint him to you, either in his villanous efforts to crush the liberties of his people, and to establish the tyranny of prerogative upon the ruins of the English constitution; or, in his pitiful pedantry, erecting himself into an ecclesiastical judge, and setting himself up as the Pope of Great Britain. We will not represent him in his unjust and illiberal prodigality, stripping the Crown of its wealth, robbing his subjects of their property, and despoiling the best servants of the state of their just reward, to bestow with a lavish and a thoughtless hand the plunder of the people upon the unworthy heads of base and ill-deserving favourites. We will not display him in his cold, fanatical cruelties, more horrible than the wildest excesses of passionate tyranny; we will not show him dangling with his upstart minions, in those sickening scenes which have caused not unreasonable suspicions of the most horrible crimes.

We will leave the course of James I. to the page of

history, where it remains a foul blot, which not all the blood and horrors of the great rebellion—of which it was the origin and cause—have been able to efface. If ever the sins of the fathers were, according to the unshakeable decree of the Almighty, visited upon the children, such was most strikingly the case in the destiny of the unhappy race which sprang from his loins.

We must, however, touch upon some points affecting the fate of several of those whom we have brought upon the scene; and first we must conclude the sad tale of the conspirators. We shall do so, however, as briefly as possible; for this, too, is a matter of mere history, and only one or two of those personages lived to take part in the succeeding events.

As the plague still raged in London, the judges met at Maidenhead to inquire into the case against the prisoners, and examinations were entered into of a very irregular character, which were succeeded by a special commission, the chief end and object of which seemed to be, to set every principle of law and justice at defiance, to trample out the last sparks of liberty and security, and to show the British people that they were quite at the mercy of a vain and vicious king.

At the head of this special commission were Cecil and the Earl of Suffolk, with two chief justices; but two other judges sat in the court. The trials took place at Winchester, and George Brooke, Sir Griffin Markham, with several of the inferior conspirators, were first put to the bar. They were all found guilty, principally upon their own confessions, which were probably made in the hope of obtaining pardon; and upon all the severe sentence of high treason was pronounced. The two priests, Watson and Clarke, were also condemned; and then Cobham, Grey, and Raleigh, were severally brought to trial.

The demeanour of these three gentlemen in court excited not a little attention at the time, the deportment of each being very different from that of the others, and each marked with strong characteristic traits. Lord Cobham displayed nothing but weakness, imbecility, and fear; he trembled violently during the reading of the indictment, endeavoured to excuse himself by casting the blame upon his friends, made a confession more ample, it is generally supposed, than even truth warranted, and ended by begging hard for life, when sentence of death was pronounced upon him.

A very different scene was displayed at the trial of Lord Grey de Wilton. He defended himself with courage,

vigour, and eloquence, without the slightest sign of fear or anxiety; showed himself learned in the law of the land, and by his gallant bearing and skilful reasoning both won the favour, and shook the opinion, of many of his judges. Nevertheless, the confessions of George Brooke and Sir Griffin Markham, in which his name was mentioned, were received as conclusive evidence against him, and he likewise was pronounced guilty of high treason. When asked if he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon him, he replied at first, "Nothing!" but then added, "*Non eadem omnibus decora.* The house of the Wiltons have spent many lives in their princes' service, and Grey cannot beg his."

Raleigh was the next to undergo the torture of a public trial, and against him there was arrayed the envy of inferior minds, the hatred of a king, the malice of private enemies, the prepossession of his judges, and all the virulence of legal insolence. The conduct of the attorney-general, Sir Edward Coke, stamped him for posterity as one of the greatest villains, as well as one of the greatest lawyers, that ever lived; and his speech against the illustrious prisoner offers a model, too frequently imitated in France, of all that the counsel for the prosecution should not say.

Raleigh displayed upon this terrible occasion all those powers of mind which distinguished him through life; and he also showed much temper and moderation in reply to the virulent abuse of Coke. The evidence upon which he was condemned—namely, a vague and unsatisfactory confession of Lord Cobham, unsigned, taken down from word of mouth, and recanted in the most solemn manner by a letter to Raleigh himself, and the testimony of a man named Dyer, who swore that a stranger in Lisbon had said to him, that the King would never be crowned, for Don Raleigh and Don Cobham would first cut his throat—would of course never be even heard in a court of justice in the present day; and yet this was all that could be brought against him. But it was found sufficient in the minds of the judges; and, although Raleigh demanded that Lord Cobham should be confronted with him, and urged that no man could be condemned upon the written testimony of only one witness, he was found guilty of high treason, and condemned to death. All that the prisoner required, after the verdict was given, was, that the King should be requested that his death should be an honourable and not an ignominious one. He hinted, however, a desire that his execution should be delayed till after Cobham's,

probably in the hope that on the scaffold itself his former friend would do him justice, and declare his innocence with his dying breath.

After the trials, the court and the country were all eager to know what would be the conduct of the King, with whom alone the fate of the prisoners now remained; but James, following the usual principles of his kingcraft, kept his determinations to his own bosom, suffering not even his most favourite counsellors to know whether he would show lenity or severity. The crimes proved against George Brooke, and his general bad reputation, decided his fate, and he suffered the full penalties of high treason in the month of November, 1603. He died in the same bold and careless manner in which he had lived, apparently without either fear or regret; and the whole country seems to have approved of the firmness of the King in carrying his sentence into execution.

Different feelings, however, were entertained in regard to the two priests, Watson and Clarke, who suffered nearly at the same time. Neither of them showed the slightest want of courage, and Clarke boldly proclaimed on the scaffold, that he was a martyr to his religious faith. The Roman Catholics of course exalted their virtues and their devotion, and cried out against the severity with which they were treated by a monarch who had flattered the Papists with false hopes of toleration.

These three executions, however, created great alarm amongst the friends of the other prisoners; and various efforts were made to avert their fate by petition and solicitation. Still James remained silent and unmoved, the day appointed for the punishment of Cobham, Grey, and Markham approached rapidly, and at length the death-warrant was sent down to Winchester, and another was signed for the execution of Raleigh on the Monday following, three days after the period appointed for the fate of his fellow-prisoners. Markham received some reason to hope, from private friends at the court, that his life would be spared, but the two peers and Raleigh were directed to prepare themselves for certain death. The Bishop of Chichester and the Bishop of Winchester remained constantly with Lord Cobham and Sir Walter Raleigh, having been instructed by the King not only to give them religious consolation, but to induce them to make a full confession, with a view, it would appear, of reconciling the discrepancy of their statements.

If this was the monarch's object, however, no success was obtained; for while the weak and imbecile Lord Cob-

ham once more varied in his statements, and re-asserted all that he had previously laid to the charge of Italeigh, the knight firmly maintained his innocence, and varied not in the least from his former account.

At length, on the Friday appointed for the execution, Markham was brought out of the castle, at ten o'clock in the morning, to the scaffold erected on the green. Finding all the preparations for the work of death ready, he complained bitterly of having been deluded with false hopes, admitted that he had listened but little to the exhortations of the priests, having been always assured that he would receive a pardon, and added that he was in no degree prepared to die.

Nevertheless, he displayed no want of courage, but calmly took leave of some of his friends who stood near the scaffold; but one of them having given him a handkerchief to cover his eyes, he threw it indignantly from him, saying that he could look death in the face without blushing. He then crossed himself, knelt, and prayed; after which he stripped off his doublet, and turned back the collar of his shirt, that his neck might receive the blow of the axe unimpeded. Whilst he was performing this last sad ceremony, a Scotch gentleman, of the name of John Gibb, groom of the bedchamber to the King, approached the scaffold from the side of the castle, and called the sheriff down to speak with him. Their conversation seemed long to the spectators, and probably not less so to the unfortunate Markham, who remained with his neck and shoulders bare, waiting for the order to lay his head upon the block. At length Sir Benjamin Tichborne, the sheriff, returned, and addressing the prisoner, said, "Sir, since you tell me that you are so ill-prepared for death, having been led by false hopes that your life would be spared, I take upon me, after consultation with a gentleman attached to the King, to grant you two hours' respite, that you may reconcile yourself, if possible, to God before you die.—Follow me."

Hastily covering his throat, and resuming his garments, with his whole brain whirling and his heart full of doubt and uncertainty, Markham followed the sheriff from the scaffold, and was conducted to the wide old stone chamber known in those days as Prince Arthur's Hall, where, the door being locked, he was left to meditate in solitude, without even the presence of a priest to afford him consolation or encourage him to hope.

In the meanwhile, Lord Grey de Wilton was led to the scaffold, accompanied by a Puritan minister of the name of

Field, and a large troop of noble friends. His countenance was gay and smiling, his whole demeanour easy and unaffected; and after Field had prayed for some time, the young lord addressed the people in an eloquent speech, full of deep religious feeling, and confidence in the mercy of God. He looked, says one of the authors of that day, more like a bridegroom than a condemned criminal.

In the midst of his speech, however, he was interrupted by the sheriff, who informed him that he had the King's command to stay the order of the execution, and to behead Lord Cobham first. With much surprise, and with no expression of satisfaction, Lord Grey, whose mind was perfectly made up to his fate, suffered himself to be led back to the castle, where he also was locked up in Prince Arthur's Hall, to converse with Sir Griffin Markham upon their strange situation.

Lord Cobham was next brought upon the scene, and he also went through the same ceremony of prayer and preparation for the block. He showed none of that timidity and want of resolution, now that his fate was decided, which he had displayed while it seemed doubtful, but maintained that what he had said of Sir Walter Raleigh was true, though, as some writers have justly observed, no one could tell what he did really wish to impute and what he did not, as, amongst his various confessions and retractions, there was no one part that did not contradict another.

As he was about to kneel down to receive the stroke of the axe, the sheriff stopped him, saying, that he had orders to confront him, even at that last hour, with some of the other conspirators; and a message having been sent into the castle, Lord Grey and Sir Griffin Markham were brought back to the scaffold, where Sir Benjamin Tichborne addressed them in a long speech, inquiring whether they did not confess they were justly condemned, and merited death.

To this they assented without reserve, and the sheriff announced to them that the King, in his great mercy, had determined to spare their lives. A full pardon, however, was not given; and Lords Cobham and Grey were destined to endure a long and painful imprisonment, terminated in the case of the first by his escape being connived at, and he himself allowed to drag out a few years in the most abject poverty and misery, till a wretched death, hastened by actual want, filth, and wretchedness, terminated the sorrows of a man who not long before had been one of the most wealthy peers of the realm. The proud and eager spirit of Lord Grey brought his career to an earlier close;

and that most common of all diseases, which has obtained—why or wherefore I know not—the name of a broken heart, terminated his sufferings a few years after. Markham and several of the inferior conspirators were banished from the realm; and of one of them, at least, we shall have to speak hereafter. Raleigh, as all the world knows, was suffered to languish in prison for many years, with a capital sentence hanging over his head, and destined in the end to be one of the most illustrious victims to the tyranny and injustice of a base and low-minded king.

Thus did James contrive even with mercy to mingle tyranny, to deprive apparent clemency of all real lenity, and to display the pitiful frivolity of his nature in the solemn exercise of his holiest and his highest prerogative. There were not one of those, except Markham, whom he relieved at Winchester, to whom immediate death would not have been pity, compared with the fate for which he reserved them; and yet the country rang with applause even while the spirit of historic truth stamped the act with the infamous brand it deserves.

CHAPTER XVI.

SUCH, then, as we have seen in the last chapter, was the termination of the conspiracy in which the name of Arabella Stuart was employed by bad men, for their own purposes, without her own will or consent. But what had in the meantime become of that sweet girl herself, whom we left at the inn at St. Neot's, ill in body and mind? Several days passed before she recovered entirely, and the learned physicians who had been called from Cambridge to attend upon her, asserted that she had undoubtedly partaken of some poisonous substance.

Arabella herself was incredulous, and attributed in her own mind the fit of sickness which had overtaken her, to the care and anxiety which she had previously endured. But the learned doctors assured her that perhaps it might be a fortunate event she had taken this poison, as, under the good management with which she had been treated, it would act as an antidote against the infection of the plague, which in all probability she would otherwise have caught, as the case of Sir Harry West was undoubtedly one of a pestilential character.

In the meantime, at the old Manor House at Bourne, the good knight lay upon a bed of sickness: and in the

close and heated room, watching the death-like countenance, bathing the burning brow with the essences used in those days, holding the refreshing cup to the parched lip, and smoothing the rough pillow of fever, day and night, sleepless, tearless, noiseless, sat Ida Mara, repaying with devotion unto death the first benefit that she had received at the hands of man. And he felt all her kindness; he would gaze in her face with almost the tenderness of a father, and, could he have shed tears, his eyes would often have filled, as he thought that, in a few short days, she might be lying in the same burning agony that he then felt, or that fair form might be blighted, and given up to the corruption of the grave, as the consequence of her efforts to save him. It was not alone that he saw she mingled skill with kindness—that with her own hands she made drinks for him which tasted grateful even to his parched tongue, that he seemed to obtain relief from many of the simples that she prepared, and that it was evident that she had learned not a little of the best part of the healing art while in the house of the Druggist—it was not this alone which made him willingly take all that she administered, and obey her lightest word, as if she were old and he were young; but it was that he would not give her an instant's pain or uneasiness in the course of her anxious attendance; and even in the delirium which at length came on, her voice would sooth him, her entreaties keep him tranquil, when no effect was produced by either those of his old servant Lakyn, or those of the good housekeeper Dame Cicely, who were the only persons that would venture to remain in the house as soon as it was discovered that the disease was really the plague.

At first, when the poor Italian girl was left behind by Arabella, the housekeeper had shown some indignation at what she considered the intrusion of a stranger, and had ventured upon more than one "Marry come up!" with the word "Minx!" muttered in a low tone, so that her good master could not hear it.

A short conversation, however, with Matthew Lakyn a good deal mitigated her anger, and when she witnessed the anxious care of Ida Mara for the old knight, and saw her wipe the tears of apprehension from her eyes, when sometimes she quitted his chamber for an instant, she could not help saying to herself, "Well, thou art a good creature, and a devout. There are not many like thee in thy country, I'll warrant. Thou art almost as kind as if thou wert English bred and born."

At length came the climax of the disease; and during a

long and fearful night, Ida Mara knelt by the bedside of her benefactor, pouring forth low murmured prayers in her own tongue to the great Physician who alone can cure. The old man was no longer sensible to anything that was said, and though he talked continually, it was but with the mutterings of delirium, while his eye ranged coldly round the chamber, and seemed to see strange sights. Often Ida Mara held his hand in hers, and often put her small fingers on the pulse, till at length, towards morning, she ran down to Lakyn, who had left the room about half an hour, and said, "He must have wine!"

"What, girl!" cried the old housekeeper, "in the plague?"

"Ay," said Ida Mara, "he must have wine!—The change has come on, his pulse is low and faint, if he have not wine now he will be dead ere six hours be over. Little, and that cautiously, must be given; but he must have it, if you would save him."

Dame Cicely looked at the old servant, and the old servant at her; but the girl spoke in a tone of authority, and Lakyn answered, "I had better give it her; wine is a good thing at all times, and if that won't save him I fear nothing will.—What shall it be, my dear,—sack?"

"No, no," cried the girl, "no fiery wine; neither sack nor Burgundy."

"Good soft wine of Bordeaux," replied the old man; "I will fetch it in a minute."

"Why, where learned you all this leechcraft?" asked Dame Cicely, while he ran down into the cellar.

"In part from the bad man from whom my benefactor delivered me," answered Ida Mara; "but it was of the plague my mother died; and a good and great mediciner of my native town afterwards told me, what we should have done to save her.—Oh, here is the wine. Now give me one of those spoons—that one, that one."

"What matters it, girl?" said the old housekeeper, reaching the spoon to gratify her.

"Do you not see," said Ida Mara, "this has got the image of St. Luke, the good physician, upon it?" and while the old housekeeper called her a poor benighted papist, the girl hastened back to the bedside of the old knight, and from time to time moistened his lips with the wine.

Just as the day dawned fully in the sky, Sir Harry West closed his eyes, and fell into a gentle sleep, and when the housekeeper stole in, about an hour after, she found him still in the same, while Ida Mara, kneeling by his bedside, and utterly exhausted by long watching, had suffered her

fair head to droop forward on the bed clothes, and was buried in slumber also.

She withdrew without waking them, and till nearly noon the knight remained asleep. When he woke, all delirium was gone, and, though reduced to infant weakness, he was evidently better. His amendment was steady, though slow, but would probably have been more rapid had it not been for the apprehensions he felt for his tender nurse, on whose cheek the rose had become somewhat pale, and whose eye had grown dim and heavy. These, however, were only the natural effects of anxiety and watching; and as soon as she could leave him, to enjoy the breath of the free air, her colour and her health returned.

It is a curious fact, indeed, but one not by any means rare in cases of pestilential disease, that none of those who remained with the old knight during his sickness, and saw him continually during the whole course of the malady, were infected by it; while three of the servants, who fled from the house after seeing their master only for a few minutes, were stricken with the plague, and died in the neighbouring hamlets, carrying the disease with them to the cottages of their relations. A firm and steadfast mind is one of the best preservatives against pestilence, as well as against many another evil.

For some months the house was shunned; and it was not till the plague began to disappear from England that Ida Mara ventured to return to her fair mistress. She did not do so, however, without being rendered by the act of Harry West independent of human caprice. He could, indeed, have found it in his heart never to part with her; but evil-tongues were as prevalent in those days as in our own, and even age and respectability cannot hope for impunity from the malice or folly of men. He thought, too, that it would be better for the devoted girl herself to be about the person of one so kind and good as Arabella Stuart; and by settling upon her, with all legal form, a hundred crowns a year—then a considerable sum—he secured her against any change in the favour or fortunes of her mistress.

Arabella welcomed her back with great satisfaction, and never from that moment ceased to regard her with affection and esteem. The deep and fearless devotion which she had displayed was of a character to touch most powerfully the heart of one who knew how much such sincere attachment is needed by persons in high stations, and how seldom it is found. She was no longer considered as her servant; but more as her companion and her friend, in all

those circumstances in which her inferior rank suffered her to take a part; and great was the consolation and comfort to Arabella herself, in all the pains, and cares, and anxieties of a court, to have one always near her, on whose truth, sincerity, and regard she could fully rely.

The reader, learned in the history of those times, will know that, to a high-toned mind and feeling heart, the court of England, under the reign of James I., was a place of constant trial, anxiety, and grief. Even had not the sickening selfishness, vulgarity, and wickedness of the King himself, affected greatly the comfort of all around him, the lightness of the Queen's manners, though perhaps not running to criminality, and the encouragement given to vice of every kind, rendered the palace a painful as well as disgusting abode, for any one of a pure spirit.* The freedom, indeed, from all those formal restraints which are, in fact, the shackles that vice imposes upon virtue, might prove not disagreeable, even to a noble mind like that of Arabella Stuart. To go whithersoever she would, unwatched and uncensured; to see whomsoever she would, without care or without fear; to be as free in her actions as her own principles would admit, could never be productive of any harm in one who sought not to abuse such liberty. But it was remarked of her, that unless when obliged to do so, as one of the Queen's train, she rarely, if ever, adopted the much misused habit of the day, in wearing a mask when travelling, or walking abroad. She wished her actions to be as free as the sunshine, but as open also.

In the meantime a number of important events occurred, which require but brief notice here.

The quarrels of the King with his Parliament, his efforts to tread under foot the right of his people, his persecution of the Puritans, his bad faith with the Roman Catholics, the rise and discovery of the famous gunpowder plot, and the well-merited execution of the diabolical conspirators, are all matters irrelevant to this history.

Not so, however, the advance in favour of one of the first minions whom the King thought fit to honour in England, Robert Carr, afterwards Earl of Rochester, one of the most despicable of those who were proud to fill the infamous place of king's favourite. This man, by birth a Scotchman, had passed some time in France, and had

* I need only cite the instance of Lady Rich, who was one of the public and favourite companions of Anne of Denmark, while undergoing the ordeal of the ecclesiastical courts on the charge of notorious adultery, fully established against her.

added the advantages of a graceful carriage, and good taste and skill in dress, to that of a remarkably handsome person. He was first introduced to the court of England by the Lord Dingwall, who selected him as his esquire at one of the tilting matches of the day. Some have supposed that he was purposely brought into such a situation, in order to attract the attention of the King, whose fondness for handsome and well-dressed minions was notorious. However that may be, Carr, in presenting to the King, according to custom, the shield and device of his knight, was thrown, in descending from his horse, at the monarch's feet, and broke his leg by the fall. James had previously noticed with great admiration the handsome squire of the Lord Dingwall, and showed the utmost concern for his accident. The young Scotchman was removed to the palace, attended by the King's own surgeon, visited daily by James himself, and during the long hours of his convalescence won every hour upon the weak monarch's regard, till he rose from the bed of sickness in the full glow of royal favour.

The dignity of knighthood was almost immediately profaned to do honour to this deedless and unworthy person; revenues were assigned to him; the King's ear was completely in his power; and many an hour was spent by the monarch every day in teaching him the Latin language, of which he had no knowledge, though, as Lord Thomas Howard justly observed, "it would have been better to teach him English, as he was sadly deficient in that tongue."

Leaning on his arm, pinching his cheek, smoothing his ruffled garments, James displayed himself to his court, with his new favourite, in a most painful and degrading point of view. But, fortunately for Carr himself, he was enabled to escape for some time the enmity which his unenviable position, and his own worthlessness, must have much sooner called upon him, had not a piece of real good-fortune happened to him, in the rise of a friendship between himself, and one whose experience, moderation, talents, and discrimination, supplied all that was wanting in the mind of the favourite.

It would appear that Sir Thomas Overbury, the person of whom we speak, had first been greatly noticed by Cecil, (now become Earl of Salisbury,) an unquestionable proof that he possessed real talents for business. After a time, however, either because he saw in the favour of Robert Carr the more speedy means of his own advancement, or from some other cause that we do not know, Overbury sincerely attached himself to the favourite; and, gaining a

great ascendancy over his mind, he guided him in all his proceedings with a remarkable degree of wisdom and sagacity.

By degrees, the minion rose from the condition of a poor Scotch gentleman, unknown and unheard of, to the station of Viscount Rochester, and the ruler of the court of England. He affected to behave himself with good moderation and modesty, and suffered all the power and authority which was poured into his hands, to proceed apparently more from the monarch's spontaneous act than from his solicitation. The office of Lord Treasurer of Scotland was bestowed upon him, and a number of other inferior posts; but still Carr laboured assiduously to divert the envious jealousy of the English courtiers from himself; and, as the best means of satisfying them, he excluded from his household all persons of his own nation, except one who was attached to him by the ties of blood.

At length, however, an event occurred which changed his views, his conduct, and his destiny. There appeared at the court a lady, who, though yet in her extreme youth, had been for some years married to the son of the unfortunate Earl of Essex. She was second daughter of Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk. Her elder sister having married the son of the famous Robert Cecil, the alliance between the families of Suffolk and Essex was brought about by Lord Salisbury, with a view of healing the breach between himself and the house of Devereux, to the memory of whose late chief he knew the King, his master, to be devotedly attached. But as the son of the unfortunate Essex was but fifteen years of age at the time the marriage was proposed, and the Lady Frances Howard, the bride, had not yet completed her thirteenth year, the young Earl was sent abroad to travel for some time, immediately after the ceremony, leaving his childish bride to be educated in her paternal house.

The Countess of Essex was not yet sixteen when she was introduced to the court of James; and, possessed of youth extraordinary beauty, and some talent, she soon attracted universal admiration, to which she showed herself not at all indifferent. According to the libertine manners of the day the object of admiration became immediately an object of pursuit, whatever obstacles morality might interpose; and Prince Henry himself, the eldest son of the King, appeared as one of the suitors of the fair Countess. She, on her part, showed herself cold and indifferent to the solicitation of the Prince; not, indeed, that her bosom was the abode of any pure feelings or high principles, but because she had

already conceived a passion for another, to which she was ready not only to sacrifice every moral obligation, but to violate common decency, which is sometimes powerful over minds that do not scruple to cast off every other restraint.

Rochester, however, the object of her criminal love, courted and flattered for his power, either did not see the views of the Countess in endeavouring to attract his attention, or was really indifferent towards her, and for some time escaped her wiles; but ere long she found a disgraceful means of making him acquainted with the passion he had inspired, and it soon not only became reciprocal, but rose to a height in the bosoms of both, which led them to the commission of some of the most terrible crimes with which the soul of man can be stained.

It was about the time at which the preference of the Countess of Essex for the King's favourite first began to master every consideration of virtue and propriety in her bosom, that those events occurred in the history of Arabella Stuart which recall us to the narration of adventures more immediately connected with this tale; and, merely begging the reader to remember that several years had passed since William Seymour sailed from England, without his obtaining permission to return from the honourable banishment to which he had been condemned, we shall here end this brief sketch of the intervening period.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was the afternoon of a bright summer day, and a grand tilting match had been held on a piece of ground adjoining the park at St. James's. All the world of the Capital had been admitted to the sight, and as two or three foreign princes, amongst whom was the King of Denmark, were present on the occasion, numbers of the grave citizens had left their shops and counting-houses in London, and travelled to Westminster to look on during the royal sports.

As soon as the games were over, the crowds dispersed; and, while some sauntered through those parts of the park which were open to the public, others hurried home to resume their more important affairs; and in every thoroughfare, leading from Westminster to different parts of the city, groups of men and women, in holiday attire, were seen hastening on, some laughing and talking over the events of the morning,—some with busy faces evidently considering the business they were about to resume.

Amongst the rest, appeared a man of a very showy exterior, richly clothed, and distinguished by a light and tripping step, though he was far past even the middle age. He had a boy behind him carrying his sword; his mustachio and hair, which, if one might judge by the shrivelled state of his skin, and the long wrinkles round his eyes, ought to have been grey some twenty years before, were now of a very peculiar cast of black; and though his legs were thin as well as long, his chest seemed full and powerful, owing, perhaps, to the appearance of swelling muscle which it displayed to a process as foreign to that of nature, as the method he had employed to restore the swarthinness of his hair.

While he was hurrying down the Strand—then a wide open road, flanked on one side by the houses and gardens of the nobility—amidst a cloud of dust which the manifold feet were raising from the dry and unwatered ground, a young man, carrying in his hand a large fan and an essence bottle, singled him out from the other persons who were proceeding in the same direction, and pulled him gently by the cloak. The man started and turned round, asking what the stranger wanted, with a foreign accent, which by practised ears might have been detected as assumed rather than natural.

“My mistress wishes to speak to you, sir,” said the servant, “and will thank you to step across the road to her.”

“I am at her devotion,” replied the person addressed, laying his hand upon his heart; “which is your mistress, my friend?”

“That lady, sir, in the black mantle and mask,” answered the serving man; “she is waiting for you, you see, at the corner of the lane.”

Now, the lady whom the man pointed out was of a very rotund make, and though her dress was rich enough, yet there was a sad lack of grace in the wearing of it. There were also several indescribable indications, which clearly informed the beholder that she had passed what is called the prime of life. Nevertheless, the smart gentleman, whom we have described, seemed to value her attention fully as much as if she had been the youngest and most graceful of the realm, and, with the same dancing-master-like-step with which he had been walking homeward, he crossed the road at her invitation, and made her a profound bow.

“Come with me, come with me,” said the masked lady; “I have a turn for your hand which may be worth your while.”

"Most happy shall I be, madam," replied the gentleman, with a stronger foreign accent than ever, "to accompany you anywhere, and do my little possible to serve you. But, perhaps you may be mistaken in your humble servant?"

The lady burst out into a loud fit of laughter. "You can't cosen me," she cried. "Hark ye, master, and I'll whisper a secret word in your ear which will show you that we know one another."

The gentleman bent down his head, heard what his fair companion had to say, and then, turning again towards her, looked at her from head to foot. "It can be no other," exclaimed he, at length, "than Mrs. Turner!"

"Hush!" cried she, raising her finger, "I am not so indiscreet as to mention any names. Come down the lane with me; there is a wherry waiting; we will go down the river, and have some supper at my house. I have an affair in hand, which may make a fortune for two if properly managed, and I was even puzzling my brain, as I walked down the Strand, to find a serviceable friend who had courage and wit enough to carry through a delicate affair."

"I'm your man," replied the gentleman, in good plain English, accompanying her down the lane, "and I can assure you, sweet woman, that, since I have been attached to a Spanish Ambassador, I have had many a curious operation to perform which required nice handling."

"I doubt it not,—I doubt it not, Weston," answered worthy Mrs. Turner. "And so you have been attached to a Spanish Ambassador, have you? That is the reason I have not seen you for so long, I suppose?"

"Did you not know," he asked, "that the Count de Taxis did me the honour of appointing me his domestic perfumer, and carried me abroad with him after he left England? I won the post by composing an odour such as was never smelt by the nose of man before. It had the delicacy of the violet, the power of the rose; and I combined with it a soft ethereal essence which lulled the person who scented it into a soft languor predisposing to love and repose."

"That's just the thing we may want, Master Weston," said the lady, "for we have got to do with love, I assure you."

"Can I doubt it," cried Weston, "when you have a share in the business?"

"Come, no nonsense, Master Weston," rejoined the lady, "this is a serious affair, I can assure you, by which much may be gained or lost."

"Do not call me Weston," replied her companion, in an imploring tone; "I have abandoned that name long ago,

as one casts off an old coat when it is worn threadbare. There was a hole or two in it also, it must be confessed; and I received a severe fright, which made me tremble so that it shook me out of my name."

"Why, how was that? how was that?" asked Mrs. Turner; "you are a man not easily alarmed."

"In general not," answered her companion, sinking his voice to a whisper; "but I'll tell you what occurred. One day at an inn, where I was lodging, I saw accidentally a young girl, an Italian, who had once been in my service."

"I remember her quite well," replied Mrs. Turner, "and thought you had parted with her to some nobleman."

"No, no, she parted from me," rejoined the charlatan, in the same low tone, "and took some secrets of mine with her. Seeing her in the inn, and thinking she was still with an old foolish knight, who had maltreated me and carried her off from me, I took occasion to pass through the kitchen as her dinner was preparing. I know not how it was, but by this time she was in the service of one of the highest ladies of the land. The broth that was intended for the maid, was taken by the mistress; and a fit of illness came on, which the doctors from Cambridge were fools enough to ascribe to poison. She recovered in the end, but I was in a great fright, for you know how scandalous the tongue of the world is; so, dropping the name of Weston, and giving my hair another hue, I attached myself to the Count de Taxis, and gave out that I had come to England with him."*

"And pray what may be your name now?" asked Mrs. Turner; "I must tutor my lips not to call you Weston, I suppose."

"The name I took," replied the man, "was Dr. Foramen, out of honour to a hole in my crucible, in which I once was fortunate enough to obtain a small quantity of the powder of projection. But the fools here have changed it at once into a vulgar English name, and call me Doctor Foreman."

"Udds life!" cried Mrs. Turner; "are you the Doctor Foreman skilled in magic and astrology, who lives just beyond the walls, by the Inns of Court?"

"The same, sweet lady, the same," replied Weston, with a low bow; "and a very pretty traffic I carry on, let me assure you."

* The perfumer of the Count de Taxis is mentioned by Arabella Stuart herself in one of her letters to her uncle, the Earl of Shrewsbury.

"I'll better it—I'll better it," said Mrs. Turner; "but here we are at the boat."

A very neat wherry was waiting, with a boatman well dressed, bearing his badge upon his arm; and handing her in, Weston took his seat by Mrs. Turner's side, while the boy who carried his sword, and the lady's serving-man, sat in the stern behind them. The proximity of the two latter personages prevented all private conversation, but the lady, taking off her mask for the sake of the cool air, displayed what had once been a very pretty face, and which still, considering her age, was in a high state of preservation. Cutting rapidly over the water, the boat stopped some short way before it reached the Tower; and, being handed out with great gallantry by her companion, Mrs. Turner led him through several narrow lanes to a small house, between which and the public street was a little paved yard, with an elm-tree growing in the midst of the smoke.

"This is my house now," said the lady; "and you see I, too, have prospered in the world."

"I see, I see," answered Weston; "some friend who has become sensible to your merits."

"Not alone that," replied the lady; "for though Sir Arthur Manwaring bestowed the house upon me, I owe him little more. No, no, I have many a good friend at court, who, for the services I can render them, are right liberal in their payments. But come in, come in, and take a glass of Malmsey with me."

Thus saying, she led him up a long narrow flight of stairs, to a small, well-furnished sitting room, in which was hung up a viol da gamba, and several other musical instruments, while on the table lay one or two books in velvet covers, which, when taken up, displayed to the curious eye any other subjects than those which men might have supposed formed the studies of the mistress of the mansion. One was a book of canticles, very neatly written; another was a volume of meditations by some pious divine; and a third was a still holier book, which it was almost profanation to bring into such a place.

By the orders of his mistress, the serving-man fetched some wine and sweetmeats upon a silver salver, and retired, closing the door. The lady helped her guest, and took some wine herself, smacking her lips at the flavour thereof with more unction than was quite seemly. Weston, however, was intent upon his business; and, after he had drained the long measure with its twisted stalk, he set it down, inquiring, "Now, sweet Mrs. Turner, what is this great affair?"

"I will tell you, I will tell you," said the lady, drawing her high-backed chair nearer to him—"You must know—take some sweetmeats, Weston—Doctor Foreman, I mean. You must know that there is a great personage at the court, of my own sex, and consequently one I am bound to assist in the way of friendship, who is in a very lamentable case—Fill your glass, Doctor, it will bear repeating. This lady is the daughter of one of the King's great friends, and the niece of another——"

"Hum!" cried Weston, laying his finger on the side of his nose; "Lady Cranbourne?"

Mrs. Turner shook her head. "Wrong," she replied, "wrong; but not far wrong either."

"I have it," said Weston—"the Countess of Essex?"

"I name no names, as yet," answered Mrs. Turner, with a look of affected discretion; "but the lady I mentioned is young, beautiful, and very unhappy, and consequently deserves the compassion and charitable assistance of every one, both man and woman."

"She shall have it," said Weston, solemnly,—if she be rich enough to pay for it."

"That she is, beyond all manner of doubt," replied Mrs. Turner; "and will pay well, too, I can assure you."

"Ay, but expound, expound," cried the charlatan; "what is her ailment? We must know the disease before we can find a cure."

"Love!" said Mrs. Turner; "love! ay, and hate, too. She is in love with an object who shows himself indifferent to her charms."

"The hard-hearted tiger!" exclaimed Weston; "we must soften him, Mrs. Turner."

"That is the very point," replied the lady. "But her affliction is greatly increased by her having a husband, to whom she was married in her childhood, who has just returned to England, and to whom she must go home in a few days, if something be not done to prevent it."

"A perilous case," said Weston; "yet there is a remedy for all things. Now, what does the lady require?"

Before Mrs. Turner could answer, a quick foot was heard running up the stairs; and the next moment a maid servant, entering the room, exclaimed, "Madam, madam, there's a lady must see you instantly!"

Mrs. Turner started up, crying, "Into the other room behind there!" But while these words were still upon her tongue, another figure presented itself at the door; and a lady with a large Spanish mantilla over her shoulders, and the ordinary black velvet mask upon her face, entered,

with a step, hasty indeed, but full of grace, pausing suddenly when she saw that there was a stranger in the room.

"Who is that?" she asked, in the tone of a princess, pointing to Weston, with her hand still covered by a rich glove of red and gold. "Did you not get my message?"

"No, madam," replied Mrs. Turner, in humble accents; "I have been out all the morning. This is Doctor Foreman, madam, the famous physician and astrologer."

"What! the man we were talking of?" cried the lady. "Oh, then I am very glad it so falls out. You may leave the room girl," she continued, addressing Mrs. Turner's maid; "what stand you there for?"

The servant instantly retired and closed the door, at the imperious mandate she received; and the lady, casting her mantilla on a chair, withdrew the mask from her face, displaying to the admiring eyes of Weston one of the most beautiful creatures he had ever beheld. The complexion was clear and resplendent, every feature beautifully cut, the large dark eyes shining like living diamonds, the parted lips showing the pearly teeth beneath, the neck, the shoulders, and every rounded limb, full of grace and loveliness; but there was a certain contraction of the marble brow, and keenness, almost fierceness, in the sparkling eyes, which spoke too plainly the eager and passionate spirit within that exquisite form. The charlatan had risen when she entered; and she now turned her bright unblenched eye upon him, scanning his features, as if she thought by them to discover whether the man before her possessed, in reality, the powers which were attributed to him. Weston, however, was finished in his trade; and he replied to her glance with one as keen; and, after having remained in silence for a moment, he said, "Perhaps, madam, I had better retire. You may have business with Mistress Turner?"

"No; stay," replied the lady, thoughtfully; "I want you. Has this good woman told you who I am?"

"No, madam," answered Weston; "she has never mentioned your name to me. I have but this instant arrived."

"Do you know me, then?" demanded the lady, quickly.

"No," he answered, in a decided tone: "I never saw any one so beautiful before!"

"Pshaw!" said the lady, with a smile; "what is the use of beauty? Are you a foreigner?"

"The country of my birth," answered the charlatan, "is unknown; but I have studied long in foreign universities, and may have a Spanish or Italian accent."

"A very strong one of some kind—I know not what," replied the lady. "Mark ye, sirrah ! are you a true man, or an impostor ?"

"My sublime art, madam, does not permit of my telling an untruth," rejoined Weston. "The moment I did so, I should lose all power and knowledge. Do not think, madam, that the height of science can be obtained by deep study alone. The mind must subject itself to certain rules, fixed and decided, amongst which the telling truth upon all points of art is the great fundamental. I may refuse to answer you, if I will ; but, if I do answer, the nicest judging eye must not be able to discover one grain of deceit in all I say."

"Well, then," exclaimed the lady, "tell me under what misfortunes I suffer, if you would have me believe you skilful as you pretend."

"First madam, let me know your name," said the artful man ; "that, at least, I ought to be made acquainted with."

"No, no," answered she to whom he spoke, "that were half the history. My name you shall know, if you satisfy me."

"This is hard," cried Weston, with assumed mortification ; "you must not tax science more than it can bear—I will speak as I believe however ; though mind, I tell you beforehand, that I cannot be so sure as if I knew your name, and the hour of your nativity. Madam, will you let me see your hand ?—the right hand, if you please ; and you, Mrs. Turner, in the meanwhile, ask my boy for my sand-glass and square."

The lady drew the glove from her fair and beautiful hand, and stretched it out for the inspection of the charlatan, who gazed upon the few lines in the soft and glossy palm with an air of apparently deep consideration.

"Ha !" he cried, "I see you are under eighteen years of age."

"A good guess," said the lady. "What more ?"

"We will wait a little," answered Weston. "I could say more even now, but I would fain consult the sand first."

As he spoke, Mrs. Turner, who had left them, returned, bearing in her hand a small glass box filled with very fine sand, and a flat silver ruler, with a moveable limb at a right angle, which she delivered into the hands of her male companion.

"Bless my heart, doctor," she cried ; "I hope there is going to be no magic. I cannot suffer magic in my house

"Nothing but natural magic, Mrs. Turner," replied the impostor, "which is quite lawful. Every part of nature has its secrets, which it is the province of science to discover, and also its sympathies with every other part, from which sympathies, when revealed in one instance, we gain a knowledge of all that affects other beings, sympathised with by the object under our hands. Thus this common sand, when brought under certain influences, displays its relationships to different parts of creation; and especially, as it is fluctuating and unsteady, light, and blown about by every gust of wind, exactly like the course of human life, so does it bear a near affinity to human beings, and discovers, when compelled, their fate and circumstances!"

The lady had listened with deep attention to every word of the rigmarole which the man uttered; and the reader must not be surprised at a wild, passionate, ill-educated, unprincipled girl of eighteen years of age being deceived by visionary nonsense, which has convinced the mind, ay, and disturbed the brain, of persons otherwise deserving the name of sages and philosophers. The charlatan next took the sand, smoothed it exactly in the glass box, seemed to look anxiously for every irregularity, ascertained that it was of an equal height on either side, and then drew, with the sharp end of a silver ruler, several signs and figures round the edges, leaving a space vacant in the middle.

"Now, madam," he said, "take this instrument, and write the first letter of the christian and surname of any person you think fit. It may be either your own, or that of some one else; but you must have a very deep interest in that person."

The lady considered for a moment, and then wrote lightly in the sand the letters R. C. Weston then took the glass box, and raised it gently from side to side, suffering a part of the sand to roll over the figures that had been drawn. He next gazed at the surface attentively; and, setting the instrument down with a look of surprise and respect, he took a step back and bowed low to the lady.

"Why, what is the matter now?" she exclaimed, emphatically.

"I did not know your ladyship's high rank," he replied; "and I fear what I have to say may offend you."

"No, no; speak what you have to say," she answered. "If it be true, I shall find no offence."

"The geomantic science can never speak aught but truth," answered the charlatan; "and by its rules I tell you, that you love where you ought not, and love not where you ought."

"Ought!" cried the lady, with her cheek reddening.

"Am I to have constantly that hateful bond thrust upon me, contracted in my infancy, when I was incapable of judging for myself?"

"I feared you would be offended, madam," said Weston, well pleased to see the effect of his words, but affecting a tone of grief and apprehension. "Nevertheless, I told you that I must speak the truth, if I spoke at all."

"Well, well," she replied; "I deny not that it is the truth. So much for the present—now for the future. Can you speak of that? Shall I be successful in my love—whether it be right or wrong?"

"Oh, yes, my lady, never fear," said Mrs. Turner, in a coaxing tone; "every woman who sets her heart upon it can be successful in her love if she chooses. Men are not such coy creatures as we are."

"Hush, woman! let him speak," cried the Countess, imperiously; "I hate such wheedling. I would know by his science what fate has in store."

Again Weston approached the table, and scanned the sand-glass earnestly. "Madam," he said, "I think you will obtain all that you desire; but it will be with great difficulty, the most skilful management, and with the assistance of many curious and important arts. You see, madam, that the sand has rolled completely over the name of Robert Carr."

"Robert Carr!" exclaimed the lady, almost with a shriek. "That name was not written there!"

"Oh, yes, madam, it was," replied the impostor; "you only traced R. C., but other hands than yours filled up the names at once for the eyes of science. But, as I was saying, you see the sand has rolled over that name; while your sign, which is here, remains clear and uneffaced, showing that you may obtain great power over him. But you will perceive, also, that between it and the house of fortune—I wish it to be all clear to you—a wave has grown up, which threatens great obstacles; while these two stars, signifying two skilful and attached servants of your ladyship, I know not whom, remain powerful over the object of your wishes. Here are two or three others, all more or less powerful in their degree; and here your nearest relation stands strong in opposition."

"My father!" cried the lady.

"But, at the same time, his co-ordinate looks favourable; and the sign of another near relation is not adverse. But still, after all, these two small stars, though seemingly very inferior, are, as you see, most powerful for your purposes."

The lady had leaned her elbow on the table, and was covering her eyes with her hand. "This is very extraordinary," she murmured, "if I had even told the woman who it is. Have you anything more to say?" she continued, aloud.

"Nothing, madam," he answered; "this is all that geomancy can tell me; but if you think fit to come to my house to-night, and the stars be out, as most likely they will, I can give you more information; and can only say that, as far as my poor skill extends in any way, either as astrologer or physician, skilled in many arts unknown in this country, I am right willing to serve so beautiful and high a lady until death."

"I will employ you, I will employ you," replied the lady; "and, if you do serve me, you shall be rewarded beyond your hopes. Now, tell me, whom do these two stars indicate?"

"I know not, madam," replied Weston; "but, certainly, they must be two very skilful persons. Perhaps I may myself be one."

"Perhaps so," said the lady; "come to me to-night, good Mrs. Turner, to Northampton House, just as the clock strikes nine; it will then be growing dark, and we will away to the good doctor's house. There is some gold for you. Hark! a word in your ear! Explain to him all I told you—the name he has divined is but too true. Tell him—tell him! For though, I know not why, I feel no shame in this matter, yet I would fain some other lips began the tale."

Thus saying, she fastened the mask upon her face again, threw the mantle over her shoulders, and left the room.

Mrs. Turner approached the casement, gazed out for a minute through the dim lozenges of glass, and then, turning round to Weston, burst into a low but merry laugh.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WE must now hurry the reader from the gay capital to a small hunting seat at Royston, in which the King took peculiar delight, on account of the woods and wild forest scenery in which that part of the country abounded at the time we speak of, and which afforded him the opportunity of enjoying at liberty his favourite pastime of the chase.

According as caprice dictated, the monarch would go either in private, accompanied by his favourite, and a few

of those whom he condescended to look upon as his friends, or with the whole court, which was then packed into very narrow compass, many of the domestics and attendants being lodged out in the cottages round about, and the whole country swept by the King's purveyors to provide for the royal household, much to the annoyance of the poor inhabitants, who saw their fowls, their butter, their eggs, and their milk, carried away against their will. Nor was this the only inconvenience they suffered. Had they received full and ready payment for the food, which was taken, as it were, from their very mouths, they might have contented themselves. But such was not the case, and it was not till after long delays, and the deduction of an enormous per centage to the greedy officers of the King, that they obtained a scanty and illiberal compensation for the actual loss they sustained.

On the present occasion, the whole court were at Royston; and so many human beings were crowded into the palace, that it was only when the hounds were abroad, and the greater part of the courtiers following the King to the chase, that anything like quiet and tranquillity was to be found in the building.

Such, however, was the case one morning; when Arabella Stuart, who had accompanied the Queen to Royston, after wandering out for a short time, returned towards the house with a paper in her hand, followed, a step behind, by an honest Hertfordshire farmer, to whom she spoke from time to time.

On the terrace before the palace, she turned to the man, saying, "Well, my good friend, I cannot undertake to give it to the King himself, because he is easily offended at such matters; but I will place it in the hands of those who can venture more boldly than I can, and who, I doubt not, will see right done to you."

The man bowed and withdrew; and Arabella, entering the vestibule, inquired of one of the servants, who sat there enjoying the usual listlessness of a palace, if Lord Rochester had gone with the King. The man replied in the affirmative; and she then asked, "Is Sir Thomas Overbury in the house?"

"Yes, lady," replied the man; "I saw him a minute ago, writing letters in the cabinet on the left hand, at the top of the stairs."

Arabella immediately proceeded thither, and, opening the door, went into the cabinet, where she found a young man, of a handsome person and agreeable expression of countenance, with a high forehead, dark eyes, and a look of intense thought, not unmingled with melancholy, in his

face—that calm and thoughtful gloom which is generally found in men of great ambition. He was writing with a rapid hand and eager eye, and did not look round when the door first opened. The moment after, however, the lady's step caught his ear; and, raising his face, he instantly started up when he saw her.

"Good morning, Sir Thomas Overbury," said Arabella, advancing to the table: "I have a favour to ask of you."

"To do so is to confer one, madam," replied the knight, advancing and placing a chair: "pray be seated, and let me know your will. It has but to be known to be obeyed by me."

"You are very kind, Sir Thomas," answered Arabella, taking his words as a mere matter of compliment; "but I know you are always willing to do the best in your power for those who suffer by any of the abuses which occasionally follow every court. This paper is a petition from a poor farmer in the neighbourhood against some of the King's purveyors, who have unnecessarily, it seems, swept off the whole stock of his farm; and, because he remonstrated, have cut down the trees before his dwelling.* Neither have they, as yet, paid him for anything, nor even allowed his account."

"Alas, madam!" replied Overbury, with a sorrowful expression of countenance, "this is but one out of some twenty or thirty. What do you wish me to do with it?"

"Merely to ask Lord Rochester," replied Arabella, "to deliver it into the King's own hand, and, if possible, to obtain justice for the poor man."

Sir Thomas Overbury took the paper, and looked at the amount claimed. "I believe, madam," he answered, "that my Lord of Rochester would rather pay the money out of his own purse, than present this to his Majesty. The former I will undertake he shall do, at your request."

"Nay," replied the lady, "that is not what I could desire. It is the King's own debt, not Lord Rochester's. Neither could I, as you may easily understand, make any such a request to his Lordship."

Sir Thomas Overbury smiled: "You might make any request, madam, that you pleased, and be quite assured," he said, "that your request would immediately become his wish."

Arabella was somewhat surprised at the very courteous terms of Sir Thomas Overbury; for, although he had always treated her with due respect and attention, there was no intimacy subsisting between them, and even less between herself and Lord Rochester.

* Such acts were not at all uncommon in the reign of James I.

"You are very kind," she answered; "but all I can desire is, that his Lordship would present the petition to the King, who I feel very sure will grant it at his request."

"Ah, madam!" replied the knight, "you know not how difficult it is to get petitions acceded to; but I hope, if my Lord Rochester succeeds in this, he may be equally successful, should he some day be a petitioner to your Ladyship."

Accustomed to flattering speeches, to praises of her beauty, and to hints of deeper attachment, which her high rank prevented those who felt it from declaring more openly, Arabella might have thought little of the pointed expressions of Sir Thomas Overbury, had there not been a seriousness in his tone and manner that alarmed her.

She rose then immediately, and again thanking him for his civility was about to retire; but he stopped her, saying, "One moment, lady: I have long wished for an opportunity of speaking a few words to you." He then paused and hesitated, while Arabella remained silent, gazing upon him with an anxious and inquiring look.

"Perhaps, madam," said the knight, at length, "you may think me very officious and impertinent, but if I be so, it is from my sincere regard to two high persons, whose fortunes much depend upon each other."

"I really do not know, sir, what you mean," replied Arabella.

"I will explain myself," continued Sir Thomas Overbury. "My Lord of Rochester, my kind master and very good friend, is noble, as you know, by birth, but has risen from a very poor estate to the highest power and authority in this realm, under the King. You are aware with what favours his Majesty has loaded him, what wealth he has bestowed upon him, and what confidence he places in him."

"I doubt not," replied Arabella, "that he is worthy of it all; and, indeed, I know him to be liberal and kind to the poor, more modest than most favourites would be in his household and demeanour, and, moreover, devoted to the King, of which we have a striking instance, as I hear, the other day, in giving five-and-twenty thousand pounds in gold to the officers of the revenue, when he found the King's treasury was empty. If you suppose, Sir Thomas, that I am one of those who envy him his good fortune, or deny him good qualities, from jealousy of the King's favour, you are quite mistaken."

"Madam, I know your noble heart too well," said Overbury, "to suspect it of harbouring such pitiful feelings; and, dealing with you simply in frankness and candour, I was about to lay before you the evils as well as the advan-

tages of my Lord Rochester's position, trusting to your honour never to reveal that which I shall say."

"Of that you may be quite assured," replied Arabella.

"Well then, madam," continued the knight, "you see Lord Rochester, as he now stands at the height of power and favour, courted and flattered by all men, each day advancing in wealth and distinction, and having every vacant office in the state at his disposal. Young, too, he is, and certainly most strikingly handsome, with health unimpaired by the various vices of the day—by drunkenness, or dissolute living; so that, in all probability, his life will be long preserved. But, at the same time, it must not be concealed that all this fabric of greatness stands at present on a frail foundation. I do not mean the favour of the King, for that, I believe, unless from some great fault on his Lordship's part, will only be terminated with the King's life. But, lady, I am now going to say what I would venture to no other ears than yours: the King's life itself is uncertain—his physicians do not augur that it will be a long one. The violent exercises of the chase, to which he addicts himself so passionately, daily wear down the powers of a constitution naturally feeble. A thousand accidents, too, might happen to deprive us of our sovereign; and, were he gone, the apparent enmity of the Prince would easily find means to effect my Lord's ruin, unless his friends can contrive to fix his fortunes upon a stronger foundation than at present. Now, lady, will you forgive me if, leaving the picture of this nobleman's fate, I turn to paint that of another—your own?"

"I fear," said Arabella, who felt her heart beating with apprehension of what was to come next, "I fear the Queen may require me, I have been absent long."

"I will not detain you many minutes," replied Sir Thomas Overbury; "but indeed you must hear me out; it is but justice to me after what I have said. You yourself, madam, as I know you feel, are placed in a very peculiar and painful position."

Arabella seated herself, and leaned her head upon her hand.—"Of the highest rank that subject can attain to," continued the knight, "the next heir to the Crown, failing the King and his royal children, with less wealth than your merits well deserve, and denied all power and influence, the object of vain conspiracies to every idle traitor, and of jealous apprehension to your royal cousin, you are denied the only consolation that could be afforded to such a fate, by being shut out from domestic happiness on motives of state policy."

"True!" said Arabella, with a sigh.

"You must have remarked, madam," continued Sir Thomas Overbury, "that all the many applications for your hand by sovereign princes, who could well pretend therunto, have been rejected without consulting you; and so it will ever be. You will be condemned to pass through life without being permitted to bestow on any one in this country, or elsewhere, the greatest blessing to which man can perhaps aspire on earth—the possession of so charming and excellent a creature as yourself."

Arabella had been somewhat moved by the first part of his discourse; and she knew that there was but one way to cover her emotion, and to avoid being forced to deal seriously with a matter which she saw might involve her in terrible difficulties if she treated it gravely. She resolved, therefore, to assume that gay and playful lightness of manner which had often been her resource under such circumstances; and though, for a moment, it cost her a great effort, she replied, laughingly, "You must not take it for granted, Sir Thomas, that I had an inclination to accept any of these mighty potentates, even if the King had wished it. The grapes, to be sure, are sour with me, as with the fox in the fable; and I will own that it is always much more agreeable to a woman to have her vanity flattered by the opportunity of saying 'No' to such tender supplications, than to have them dismissed without her interference. But, nevertheless, I can assure you, upon my honour, that if I had been left to act according to my own will and choice, not one of all these gentlemen who have asked the King for my poor hand should have obtained it. You cannot say, Sir Thomas, that you have ever seen on my part the least desire that their suit should be approved—or the least disappointment at their rejection."

"Certainly not, madam," answered the Knight; "and I can easily conceive that a heart like yours, knowing that domestic happiness is rarely, if ever, obtained in a royal station, would gladly avoid such a state. But still, lady, you must be convinced that, if the King refuses you to foreign princes, he will be still more resolute in denying you to almost any of his own subjects."

"To any, I should think," replied Arabella.

"To any but one," replied Sir Thomas Overbury, "to whom, in his present mood, he can refuse nothing. Now, lady, listen to all in one word. Your union with Lord Rochester would to him secure, first, the inestimable blessing of a wife, whom he could both love and respect—who could both make his home bright and happy, and, by her experience of courts, guide, counsel, and support him;

and, secondly, would obtain for him such an alliance with those from whom he has most to fear, as would ensure him against reverse in case of the decease of the King. You would gain an affectionate, warm-hearted, and sincere husband, who would be dependent upon yourself for the stability of his position; and, instead of being condemned to see life pass by without any of those ties which form a woman's happiness, would at once——"

"Stay, stay, Sir Thomas," cried Arabella, with a gay smile, "do not make the picture too enchanting. Consider, my dear sir, you are wooing for another, who has given no sign of love or hope.—Good faith! I shall expect, if ever I am to be a wife, to be courted, and flattered, and sought, just as much as other women, or perhaps more. Besides, the King's consent is not gained.—That would be the first step before asking mine, who, poor creature, have little power over my own destiny. Not that the King would not give me every liberty to refuse, I am sure. It is of my accepting only that he is afraid; and, depend upon it, as this hand is the only boon on earth I have to give, I will make the man who obtains it know its full value. Oh, I am a true woman! You do not know me yet, Sir Thomas. I will have all my caprices, too, according to rule and precedent; and I will make my stipulations, like the heiress of an alderman. There must be my dower, and my annual stipend, and my two coaches lined with velvet, and my gentlewomen, and my gentlemen ushers, and my horses, and grooms, and squires of the hand, and my ordinary maids and footmen, and my gowns of apparel, and my common gowns; and then there must be carpets, and hangings, and couches, and glass, and my sideboard of plate, and my canopy; and, moreover, I must be a duke's wife, so that nobody may go before me at the court.—Oh! you cannot imagine all the things that I will require," she added, with a laugh; "but, some day, you shall have an inventory of them: and now, good faith! I must fly to the Queen, for indeed, Sir Thomas, if it were known that I had been talking with you so long, and all about love and matrimony, we should both run a great risk of finding our way to the Tower. Adieu, adieu, with many thanks!" and thus saying, with a light step and gay air she quitted the room.

The moment she was in the corridor, however, her face resumed its gravity, and she murmured, "Gracious heaven! when will men cease to make me the object of their ambitious schemes?"

In the meanwhile, Sir Thomas Overbury stood by the

side of the table, and gazed down upon it with vacant eyes. "Yes," he said at length, "yes, her consent is sure, and this lightness but assumed to cover deeper things. That is clear enough. The rest must be done by Rochester; for doubtless, as she says, she will require courting.—The King, too, must be managed; but that can be done; and then, with his fortunes fixed upon a basis that nothing can shake, allied to Royalty itself, and with his dotting monarch's whole life before him, he may indeed do what he will. And I!—Why, is he not my creature, as the King is his? When, too, he owes the rock on which his fortune is planted to my counsels, he must surely show his gratitude.—He is young, warm-hearted—yet unhardened by a court; and, even granted that, in a few years, he be corrupted by the invariable selfishness and baseness of such scenes as these, ere then the eagle shall have soared on high, unless fate clip his wings. Give me three years—but three years; and if with the powers of mind I feel within this brain, and the resolution I know within this heart, I rule not in the council chamber and the senate—why, let them kick me forth as a scurvy cur, unfitted for high places."

Thus thinking, he sat himself down to write again, and did not rise till the sound of the horns warned him that the King and court were returning.

CHAPTER XIX.

WITH shouts, and jests, and laughter of no very courtly and dignified a sort, the royal party came up to the terrace; and James and his favourite, with a number of attendants, mounted the staircase, passed by the room in which Overbury had been writing, and swept on to the royal apartments.

In a minute or two after, Rochester, tall, handsome, and glowing with exercise and merriment, entered the chamber of his secretary, convulsed with laughter, and casting himself into a seat, exclaimed, "By the Lord! Overbury, here has been one of the best jests this morning I have ever seen. Did you remark, yesterday, how the King asked for Jowler, who was not with the pack?—his favourite hound, you know, whose voice, he swears, is a deal sweeter than that of the Italian music-master. Well—to-day who should make his appearance but Jowler, with a paper tied round his neck."

"A love-letter, perhaps," said Overbury.

Nothing half so sweet," replied Rochester; "for if cakes and gingerbread lie in a fair lady's eyes, and honey distils from her lips, as we tell the pretty creatures, sure her pen must be dipped in syrup and spice, but this was all gall and vinegar, though not without spirit too. The King, as soon as he saw the dog, must needs jump off his horse, to let the hound lick him. Maxwell and Boucher would have fain made away with the paper, misdoubting what it contained, I fancy; but the King would needs see it, and Chaloner, who loves a jest, bitter or sweet, untied the string from under the dog's ears, and humbly presented the paper on his knee to our royal master. At first the King turned red in the face, and his brow pricked up like the back of an old woman's wimple, but then he burst into a horse laugh, exclaiming, 'On my life, Master Jowler, thou art a witty dog, if this be thine own jest; but I doubt, like many another man's, it is but laid upon thy shoulders, poor fellow,' and thereupon he began kissing him again."

"But the paper, the paper," exclaimed Overbury, "what was written on it?"

"Why, faith, these words; for the King handed it about," answered Rochester,—“these words are something like them:—‘Good Master Jowler, we pray you speak to the King, for he hears you every day, and he will not hear us, that it will please his Majesty to go back to London, or else the country will be undone. All our provision is spent already, and we are not able to maintain him any longer.’”

"On my life," said Overbury, holding up the petition which he had received from Arabella, "I have here got another song to the same tune."

"What is it, what is it?" asked Rochester.

"A petition from a farmer against the purveyors," replied Overbury, "which your Lordship must needs present to the King."

"Not I," answered the Viscount, bursting into a laugh. "I will present no more petitions, since that affair of the man Whitstable. You know what the King said."

"No," said Sir Thomas, "I never heard."

"Well, then, I will tell you," rejoined his companion. "He first read the petition, to please me, he said; then when he saw it was about money, he swore five large oaths, to which I cannot do justice, for they were part Pagan philosophy, and part Christian blasphemy. Then he chuckled for a minute, and then he asked what the man had *ge'en* me. I told him, nothing; and then he called me a

fule, and said that Whitstable was no better, and so he should not have his money, because he did not know how to show himself thankful to those who asked it for him. No, no, I will present no more petitions."

"But, in good sooth, you must do so in this case," said Sir Thomas Overbury, "for it is at the request of a lady."

"Ay, indeed," cried Carr, somewhat more interested in the question. "What lady, may I ask, Tom?"

"A very sweet and beautiful one," replied the knight, "and one that it were better worth your while to please, than all the gerfalcons in the King's mew, though that's one high road to his royal graces."

"Her name, man," cried Rochester; "you keep me with my wit galloping all through the court."

"Draw the bridle, then," replied Overbury; "it is the Lady Arabella Stuart; and if you can contrive to fall from your horse at her feet, with as much success as you did at the King's, you may so mend your fortunes, as never to risk a fall again."

"Ay, she is very pretty," answered Rochester, in an indifferent tone, "but hardly tall enough, to my mind."

"I do not know," replied Overbury, "how that can be; she could not be well higher, without being Queen or Princess Royal of England."

"Yes, she is pretty," continued Rochester, in a musing tone; "but what is that to me? There are many as handsome women in the court, not quite so stiff and stately in their virtue. Why she and my Lady Rich do not even speak; and, to my taste, Lady Rich is the prettier woman of the two."

"Ay, for a mistress," exclaimed Overbury; "but which would you like best for a wife?"

"Oh! the Lady Arabella," replied Rochester, in a decided tone, "but that can be no question with either of them; for the Lady Rich is the wife of two men already, and the Lady Arabella will never be the wife of any one."

"Except, perhaps, of Robert Carr, Viscount Rochester, Earl of Something, Duke of Something else," answered Sir Thomas Overbury; "and I do confess," he added, "that I envy the man who shall have the good fortune to put a ring upon that fair finger. Were it for nothing but herself, her beauty, her grace, her virtues, and her sweet humour, I would not barter her hand against the Indies. But when we think of her rank, and the station she will give her husband——"

"Why, Overbury, you are in love with her," cried Carr, laughing.

"I wish you were," answered Overbury; "my care for your fate would then be at an end."

"It would be of no use," rejoined Rochester; "but come, Overbury, speak out, what is it that you mean? You know my brains are not worth much, and what I have are sorely shaken with a long gallop. Speak, man, speak; I am ever ready to follow counsel; and you know Bacon says, that you are my loadstar, that ever guides me right."

"It often happens, my good Lord," replied Overbury, "that when you ask me for advice in the very difficult affairs which surround you, I have to consider long and carefully what is the best course for you to pursue, and even then I may be at times doubtful of the result. But in this case I have not the slightest doubt. The way lies open before you; and though you must tread it with care and caution, lest you should meet with a rebuff, it will as certainly lead you to fortune, as you advance upon it perseveringly and prudently."

"Come, come, Overbury," exclaimed Lord Rochester, "do not be eloquent! A few plain facts, my good friend, and a word of explanation, are all that is required. I don't mean to say positively that I will follow your advice in this matter, though I partly see your aim; but I will be reasonable, as I always am; and, if I see good cause and good hope, I will go on."

"Well, then, my Lord," said Overbury, "I will just remind you of how you stand. Though it may be an unpleasant task to do so, yet I have never found you shrink from looking the matter in the face. The King's favour is your only stay; the King's life is your term of office and authority; for though, perhaps, some of your own countrymen would rally round to support you—which, by the way, I doubt——"

"Oh yes, they would," cried Rochester, "a Scotchman will always support a Scotchman, if his own interest don't come in the way."

"Yet depend upon it," continued Sir Thomas Overbury, "under a new King, the jealousy of the English would soon clear the court of your countrymen, who, as you know, can scarce keep their footing in it already."

"That's very true," cried Rochester; "why there's a new satire out against us, Overbury, which made me laugh a good deal last night. It's all the folly of Murray and Sanquhar, as you will see, for the verses upon a Scotchman run—

They beg our lands, our goods, our lives,
 They switch our nobles, make love to their wives,
 They pinch our gentry, and send for our Benchers,
 They stab our sergeants, and pistol our tencers.

Ha! ha! ha! it's not bad, on my life; but still the conduct of such men as Sanquhar, in murdering the fencing-master, and Murray, in stabbing the sergeant, can bring nothing but ruin upon themselves, and disgrace upon all their countrymen."

"Both acts were done under the influence of strong passion," replied Overbury; "and where is the man who shall say to what pitch strong passion may lead him?"

"Never to murder a man in cold blood," cried Rochester; "no passion would ever lead you or me to such deeds."

"I do not know," replied Overbury, thoughtfully; "no man can tell till he is tried;" and he fell into a fit of musing.

It was a strange conversation. There they stood—the murderer and the murdered—the one denying the possibility of acts, which, within a very few short months, he himself committed; the other even doubting whether he might not be some time tempted to the deeds of which he was to be soon a victim. As if the question impressed them more strongly than anything that had passed before, they both remained silent for several minutes, and then Overbury proceeded, returning at once to the former subject.

"Well, my good Lord," he said, "all this shows that, however firm you may be in the King's favour,—of which I believe you possess, as I have said, a lease for life,—a stumbling horse, a stag at bay, or a defluxion on the chest, might cast you from the height of power at any hour and day of the whole year, by his Majesty's death. He who fixes his fortune on the favour of another, renders himself doubly mortal. You must try to base yours, my good Lord, on something more stable."

"On what?" asked Rochester.

"On an alliance with the royal blood," replied Overbury.

His companion fell into thought, which the knight took care not to interrupt; and at length Lord Rochester raised his head, saying, "I understand you now, Overbury; but is it possible? I see two great obstacles."

"Name them, name them," exclaimed Sir Thomas, "and I will demolish them in a moment."

"The first lies with the King," answered Rochester. "'Tis but the other day, when he refused one of the Electoral Princes for the Lady Arabella, that he afterwards

laughed with me in his closet, and said, that though he might like to put two doves in a cage, he would never put two eagles; meaning that he would never consent to her marriage with any one; and of that I am quite sure."

"With no sovereign Prince, most assuredly," replied Overbury; "for you may easily conceive what a handle might be made of her claims to the throne, in the hands of a foreign power. To any of his own subjects he will have nearly as much objection, for fear of breeding strife and contention in the land. But you, my dear Lord, are somewhat different from a common subject—you are his friend, his favourite, one on whom he can fully rely.—Nay, nay, do not shake your head! You do not suppose that if the Duke of York were of age sufficient, he would hesitate to extinguish the claims of the Lady Arabella, by a union with his own son? Does he consider you as less than his son? Has he not often declared that he regards you as his own child? Does he not, in fact, love you infinitely more than any of his own children?—Nay, to speak boldly and openly to one who, I know, will not betray me, you are right well assured that there is no principle of justice, no maxim of state policy, that he would not violate to give you pleasure. Happy for the country that you are not one ever to abuse such influence. No, my noble Lord, you have nothing to do but to praise the Lady Arabella to the King, to admire her eyes, to speak of her exquisite grace, the loveliness of her form, the sweetness of her smile, to sigh often, and look pale,—we can find means to make the complexion somewhat change,—to affect a melancholy, and be no longer cheerful, but as it were by effort. Then, when the King inquires into your gloom, let him wring from you by slow degrees that you love the lady, but yet have never ventured to pay her the slightest court, or show her the least attention, because you know his Majesty's views, and not for the dearest object of your wishes would you cross his slightest purpose. My life to a jerkin of Cordovan, the King proposes to you the marriage himself.—Now, my Lord, what is your next difficulty?"

"That lies with the lady," answered Lord Rochester; "she has never shown the slightest sign of distinguishing me from all the crowd of the court."

"Odds life! my Lord," interrupted Overbury, "do you expect a lady to woo you? did she do so, she were not worth your having; and the Lady Arabella is none such. Nay, more, my Lord, you will have to woo her, and zealously too; but the more difficult the attainment, the more worthy is the prize. You will have to make her love you.

before you can hope for her hand. But yet, as some sort of encouragement, I will tell you that she and I have been talking about you just now, and you already stand well with her. She spoke of you generously and kindly, cited the gift you had lately made to the revenue, and praised your deportment at the court. Person, too, with all women is no light matter; and to be married to the handsomest man in England, may flatter a woman's vanity, which is the first way to win her love."

"But all flatterers do not succeed with women," said Rochester.

"Because their flattery is too gross, or those to whom they address it too clear-sighted," replied Overbury; "the moment it is known to be flattery, it ceases to flatter; and therefore it is that indirect praise is so much more gratifying than any other. Few have such a stomach as our royal master, who has been compared to many things, but I wonder never to an ostrich, for he can digest iron, if it be well spiced."

"But," asked Carr, in a tone of doubt, "can this lady love at all, Overbury? Has she the feelings and passions of other women? I could not content me with a cold and indifferent bride; and I have remarked that, whatever proposals have been made for her hand, she has seemed right glad and well pleased when they were rejected—I speak not alone of men whom she has never seen, but when there was a question of Northumberland's son, and the King took him to task for wooing her, she seemed quite relieved when he retired from the court, and said, I understand, that of all the favours the King had conferred upon her, that deliverance was the greatest."

Overbury smiled. "You have a right humble opinion of yourself, my Lord of Rochester," he said, "to compare yourself to Northumberland's clumsy boy, who courted the lady with large eyes and an open mouth, like the whale that swallowed Jonas in the picture. No, no, a woman's heart is like a magazine of powder, well defended and difficult to be got at, but when once reached, ready to take fire in a minute. You must work by the sap and mine, my Lord, and I can assure you the ground is not so hard and rocky as you think. No woman was ever yet insusceptible of love, and there is but one passion that I know of, which can extinguish that magic fire. The blasts of adversity cannot blow it out. It will burn beneath the cold waters of ill-treatment and neglect. In the airless caverns of despair it shines by its own light; and down to the grave it goes, blazing up, even in death. Nothing, I say, nothing

can extinguish it but another fierce flame in the same lamp—that of ambition. It was this that taught Elizabeth to quench the fire that was in her heart as strong as in any on the earth. This made her hold back from Leicester, this guarded her against Essex.”

“Ay,” said Lord Rochester, thoughtfully; “she is very beautiful!”

“Who?” exclaimed Sir Thomas Overbury, in surprise; “Queen Elizabeth?”

“No, no,” answered Rochester, laughing; “she never was, that I know of; and heaven defend me from contemplating her beauty now—It was Lady Essex I meant.”

“Yes, so she is,” said Overbury; “but to the subject, my Lord. What say you to my scheme? If you win the lady, you gain security; you build up a fortress round your fortunes which not all the malice of your enemies can ever batter down. Methinks this alone were sufficient to make you strive, like an eager horse at a race, to win the golden prize, even were the lady less lovely and less charming than she is.”

“Why, I say at once,” replied Lord Rochester, “that I am yours to do with as you like. The prize is certainly a great one; the only question is—can I win it? You say I can, and as I never found you wrong, I am willing to believe you right. I will therefore embark in the adventure; but you must be the pilot and steer the ship, and, if you bring it safely into port, the whole honour and one half the profit shall be yours.—But first tell me how I am to deal with the lady; for I am to say to the King, it seems, when I have acted the part of a despairing lover long enough, that I have never moved her to my wishes, for fear of giving him offence.”

“Nor must you, nor must you,” cried Overbury; “it will be the safest course both with him and her. You must woo as if you wooed not; never affect in the King’s presence to pay her much attention; but in those moments which must often happen, and which you may make more frequent if you will,—when, by the chances of the court, you stand or sit beside her, then ply her with soft words—breathe not the name of love; but there are ways, you know right well, to speak without a tongue. Worship her beauty, descend on grace and symmetry, leaving her to take the praises to herself. Tell her the colour of the eyes you love the best, and be sure that the same hues shine under her dark lashes. Have the same tastes; and, in opinions, only differ with her to yield your own with faint resistance, and give her wit the triumph. Let her

perceive, without the slightest boast, that you are sought of other lovely dames, but you seek her alone.—A thousand opportunities must occur; but, as I have said, you may make many. When the King is at the council, and during all those times at which he needs not your presence, you can seek hers without seeming to do so. Often she walks alone in the gardens or the park.—How easy to cross her solitary ramble, and for a few minutes—but for a few—seize the occasion to win regard. Even now, what prevents you from going to her at once, with this petition in your hand, which she left with me for you! Tell her that you had resolved never to present another, but that if it be seriously her wish, your resolution must be broken. Then offer her service, and express some regret that circumstances have not allowed you hitherto to show her all the devotion which you feel. Follow this line of conduct till the King's consent is gained; and leave it to me, by hints and explanations, to give the true point to all you say."

"Well," said Rochester, rising, "I will go at once. Give me the paper," and taking it from the hand of Overbury, he quitted the room.

"Heaven send," exclaimed his friend, "that, in striving to light this flame in Arabella's breast, he may gain a spark of fire himself. Such cold indifference never won a love-suit yet—I cannot believe he will fail, with every advantage of person, youth, grace, and beauty—the King's favour—her only chance of marriage?—No, no, no! he cannot fail, that is impossible;" and sitting down, he leant his head upon his hand, in thought.

Two minutes after, however, Lord Rochester returned. "I cannot find her," he said; "I saw her pretty Italian girl; and, by my life! the maid's as lovely as her mistress.—I should not dislike to have such a fair lute-player myself."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Overbury, impatiently; "can she place you on the steps of the throne? For heaven's sake, Rochester, take care," he added, almost prophetically, "that some sweet mischief, such as this, does not cast you down from where you already stand!"

"Oh, most grave and reverend youth," replied Rochester, laughing, "be not afraid of my virtue. I will be as demure as a maid; and, though I cannot promise thee to look at bright eyes without admiration, I'll strangle the naughty sighs between my teeth, so that they reach not fair Arabella's ears—I will now take the paper to the King, and leave him not till I have got a warrant for the

money. Then think with what grace I will put it into her own soft hand, and say that I have brought it to her, because I know it is her delight to make her fellow-creatures happy.—I hope the hint is not too broad, companion, that I look to her to make me happy too?"

"Seriously, seriously, Rochester, I pray you," said Sir Thomas Overbury, "remember, this is no jesting matter, but one on which your future fate depends."

"Grave as a judge will I be," replied Rochester, "in all the active part of the drama; but the performers may laugh behind the scenes, good Overbury. But I will away to the King. There we shall laugh enough, I trow."

"Not with that in your hand," answered Overbury.

"Why, it may cause a storm at first," rejoined the favourite; "but if I find the dear pedagogue is very poor, I will lend his Majesty the money. Then he will call me a *fule*, and the farmer a *gowk*; and the business will end in laughter, however it may begin."

Thus saying, he left his friend in the cabinet, giving him a gay nod as he went out. But Overbury could not be cheerful: there was a heaviness in his heart which he could not account for, which some might think was a presentiment of coming evil; but it was only the load of manifold cares and ever-frowning anxieties, which try the muscles of ambition in its upward course.

CHAPTER XX.

Who has not heard of the masque at Theobalds—perhaps the most disgraceful scene that ever took place in an English court? and yet it is into the midst of that extraordinary spectacle of disgusting excess that we must lead the reader for a short time, together with some of the fairest and the best of the personages in our tale.

Not long after those conversations took place which we have in the last chapter detailed, the King, the Queen, and the whole court, were invited to spend a few days at the princely mansion of the Earl of Salisbury, to revel with the King of Denmark, who was then visiting England, and had just returned to the capital from a short tour through some of our rural districts.

The presence of this monarch in England had tended to anything but to improve the morality or decency of the people. A coarse-minded barbarian, with some of the virtues, but almost all the vices, of a half-savage state,

could not, indeed, be expected to aid the progress of civilisation in a court where he was courted, flattered, and looked up to as the brother of a Queen, whose affability of manners, in default of higher qualities, had rendered her undeservedly popular.

It must not be supposed, however, that the higher classes in Great Britain were universally polished, or free from gross faults, at the time he came. There were many, it is true, in England, as probably will always be the case, who, in point of demeanour, as well as virtue—of genius, as well as goodness—excelled any others on the earth. But there was a great mass, as there is still and ever will be, noble by birth, but not in heart; high by station, but not in principle. The rude insolence which the Scottish courtiers had brought to the English capital, filled it with feuds and bloodshed; the example of some of the most distinguished women of the court spread immorality abroad like a pestilence; and the Ordinary, so admirably depicted by Sir Walter Scott, finished the education of the young courtiers in gaming, and the excesses of the table. But it was not alone the house of Monsieur de Beaujeu which was open for such orgies, nor were they persons of high rank who alone frequented such abodes; for, at the time I speak of, there were hundreds of these dens of iniquity held in different parts of the town, where every man chose his own scale of vice and indulgence, and ruined himself or his neighbours, cut his own throat, or run his best friend through the body, according as skill and inclination might combine.

It was to the King of Denmark, however, that the court owed the gross habit of intoxication, which now became general, and which lasted from that time to a period not long before the present day. He first revived the barbarous notion in the land, that excess of drinking can be honourable; and it spread with extraordinary rapidity through all classes, affecting not alone the men, but the women of the higher ranks. Many lamentable scenes produced by this vice are to be found depicted in the papers of Winwood, and other contemporaries, but perhaps the most celebrated of all, from the disgusting excess to which the beastly sin was carried, took place at Theobalds, on the occasion to which we now refer.

Hospitality reigned in the mansion, even to profusion; the cellar was free to any one who might choose to use it; the door of the buttery stood open day and night; and the royal table actually flowed with wine.

For the entertainments of the second day of the royal visit, a masque had been prepared by the owner of the

mansion ; but it was unfortunately appointed to succeed a grand banquet, at which all the court was present. As what was then considered a delicate compliment to the King, who continued to affect, notwithstanding the bitter sarcasm of Henry IV. of France, the title of the English Solomon, the masque was intended to represent the visit of the Queen of Sheba to the wise Sovereign-of the Jews. The great hall, next to the banqueting-room, was fitted up as the Temple of Jerusalem ; and at the upper end a dais and canopy were raised for the two Monarchs, the Queen, and the principal ladies of the court.

The banquet I will not describe. Suffice it to say, it was over ; and with unsteady steps the Kings proceeded to take their seats with the Queen, and all the principal ladies in attendance upon her. The Princess Elizabeth was not present, and Arabella Stuart, from her royal blood, was seated next to Anne of Denmark. Many of the followers of the old court, who had received but little encouragement from James, had, with laudable feeling, been invited by the Earl of Salisbury ; and amongst the rest, was our good friend Sir Harry West. Though the King took no notice of him, and many of the young courtiers though fit to wonder how such an antiquated specimen of the Elizabethan days had come thither, the sweet lady whose tale we tell had stopped to speak to him as she passed onward to her seat, giving him her hand, and calling him cousin, from his distant relationship to the family of Cavendish.

"I beseech you, Sir Harry," she said, in a low voice, after a few words of courtesy, "stand behind me on the dais, and leave me not if you can help it. It will be doing me a great service to let me converse with you, rather than with one who, I fear, may be too near."

"I will be there," replied Sir Harry ; and though there is always some difficulty in making such arrangements in a crowded court, the old knight, proceeding with his usual calm self-possession and firm experience, had reached the back of Arabella's chair by the time she was seated.

The moment after, the Viscount Rochester approached ; and, though he was not one to attempt to displace a gentleman of Sir Harry West's years and reputation, he looked a little mortified, and took a position on the other side of the lady, nearer to the Queen. Arabella looked round to see if her old friend was there ; and Rochester, who, to his credit be it spoken, was quite sober, seized the opportunity to bend over her, expressing in courteous terms, though somewhat unpolished language, a hope that she did not suffer from the heat.

The lady replied with all due civility, but briefly ; and,

as she did so, her eyes were brought to the opposite side of the circle, where sat some other ladies of the court; and there, to her surprise, she beheld the lovely countenance of the Countess of Essex gazing upon her with an expression of fierce anger, which she could not at all comprehend. Without much care to discover what was the cause, however, and merely following her own plan, she turned instantly to the other side, where Sir Harry West stood a step behind her, and said a few words to him in a low tone. The knight answered, and Arabella rejoined, but their conversation was speedily interrupted by the commencement of the masque.

The gilded and painted pillars, intended for the columns of Solomon's Temple, were suddenly illuminated by girandoles of lights round the capitals, and a flourish of trumpets was heard without, when, followed by numerous attendants, a masked lady, carrying a casket in her hand, and representing the Queen of Sheba, entered the hall, and advanced towards the two Kings. The casket was loaded with a variety of shining things made in sugar, by the art of an Italian confectioner, which, though assuming the form of jewels and precious stones, contained within jellies, and syrups, and perfumes. It was remarked by those persons in the court who had not themselves paid their devotions too deeply to the god of the grape, that the step of the Queen of Sheba was quite as unsteady as that of her prototype might be supposed to have been upon the sea of glass. She contrived, notwithstanding, to reach the dais; but there, whether her feet failed her, or whether she stumbled over the step, does not appear, but she fell head foremost into the lap of the King of Denmark, bespattering him with her confectionery in a most unseemly manner. Confused and ashamed, she started up, though not without assistance; and her mask falling off displayed the face of one of the first ladies of the court, with a heightened colour, and eyes somewhat void of expression.

The Danish monarch himself, who was good-humoured in his cups, instantly started up to console the overthrown lady; and calling loudly to the musicians to begin an air which he named, he declared he would dance a measure with the Queen of Sheba. Unfortunately, however, he did not well calculate his own powers, and in the very first effort, after reeling for a moment from side to side, he fell prone at her feet, well nigh bringing her to the ground along with him.

A scene of confusion ensued, such as is happily seldom witnessed at a court; in the midst of which, the Eastern

Queen very wisely effected her retreat, and his Danish Majesty was taken up by four stout ushers, and carried into a neighbouring bed-chamber, dripping with the jellies and syrups which his fair partner had so unceremoniously bestowed upon his garments.

It is probable that the scene would have ended there, had not James, who never chose to be disappointed in his amusements, insisted upon the spectacle proceeding; and three ladies were introduced as Faith, Hope, and Charity, gorgeously dressed, though with no very light or heavenly vestments.

The further proceedings of the masque we shall describe in the words of an eye-witness, in order to win the reader's belief for things scarcely credible.

"Hope," says Sir John Harrington, in his *Nugæ*, "did essay to speak; but wine rendered her endeavours so feeble, that she withdrew, and hoped the King would excuse her brevity. Faith was then alone, for I am certain she was not joined with Good Works, and left the court in a staggering condition. Charity came to the King's feet, and seemed to cover the multitude of sins her sisters had committed. In some sort she made obeisance and brought gifts, but said she would return home again, as there was no gift which heaven has not already given his Majesty. She then returned to Faith and Hope, who were both sick in the lower hall. Next came Victory in bright armour, and, by a strange medley of versification, did endeavour to make suit to the King; but Victory did not triumph long, for, after much lamentable utterance, she was led away like a silly captive, and laid to sleep in the outer steps of the antechamber. Now Peace did make her entry, and strive to get foremost to the King; but I grieve to tell how great wrath she did discover unto those of her attendants, and, much contrary to her semblance, most rudely made war with her olive branch, and laid on the pates of those who did oppose her coming."

Thus ended an exhibition, disgraceful to all concerned, and painful to those who witnessed it. To Arabella Stuart it had, as the reader may suppose, caused not a little grief and annoyance. She felt ashamed of her sex, of her class, of her society; and during the last act of this strange scene, she had turned her eyes away, suffering them to wander over the crowd of persons who lined the hall on either side, and occupied a considerable space at the end.

In the meanwhile, Lord Rochester, who, though not constantly maintaining his position near her, always returned to it, had endeavoured more than once to engage her in

conversation, but, to say truth, without much success. At last, however, he perceived that her voice, in answering some question he addressed to her, suddenly faltered, and her reply stopped abruptly.

"Is anything the matter, lady?" asked Sir Harry West, who saw her cheek turn deadly pale.

"I am faint," replied Arabella, "—the heat, I think——"

"Will you go out into the air?" asked the old knight; but, at the same time, his eyes followed hers to a spot at the further extremity of the hall, towards which they were turned, and an involuntary exclamation of "Ha!" broke from his lips.

It was just at this moment, however, that the group representing Peace and Abundance entered the hall; and the noise and confusion which prevailed drew attention in another direction.

"Would you like to retire?" again asked the old knight

"No," replied Arabella, "no, I shall be better in a moment—this cannot last long. Would to Heaven it had never taken place!"

"It is, indeed, a disgusting affair," replied Sir Harry West. "My Lord, I wonder if his Majesty would object to that window being opened, for the lady is faint with the heat, and the King himself looks over warm."

"Oh no," exclaimed Lord Rochester, "I will open it in a minute, and give Solomon some air. Would your Majesty be pleased to let in a little of the breath of heaven," he continued, moving to the King's chair, "for it seems we have too much of the breath of earth here."

"Well flavoured with sack and canary," answered the King, "but we'll soon get out of the *hotter*. Don't you see, Peace and Plenty are retreating in confusion? and, methinks it will be wise to go out upon the terrace, and refresh ourselves in the evening air. The moon is shining, is it not? Give me your arm, Carro. I-fegs, though our head be as strong as that of most folk, the good wine of my Lord of Salisbury is well nigh as much as we can carry."

The King and Queen then rose; and, according to the proposal of James, the whole party issued forth into the wide ornamented grounds—with one exception. Arabella Stuart, whispering to Anne of Denmark that she was somewhat faint, but would rejoin her in a few minutes, darted away to her own room, where, casting herself on her knees beside her bed, she hid her face upon her hands, and prayed. Her prayers were not unmingled with tears, however; and when she rose, her eyes were red.

"They may see that I have been weeping," she said to

herself, "and I may as well put a mask upon my face as upon my heart. There will be others in similar guise ; and taking up the rarely-used black velvet mask which lay upon her dressing table, she hurried down by the small staircase, which led from her apartments, to rejoin the Queen on the terrace. At the foot of the stairs, close to the doorway by which she was going out, stood a tall and graceful figure leaning against the pillar. He drew a step back as she approached, with a cold and respectful air. But Arabella suddenly stopped, exclaiming, "Seymour ! do you not know me ?" and she put up her hand to remove her mask.

"Nay, nay," he said, stopping her ; "I know you right well, sweet lady,—no mask can hide Arabella from William Seymour."

"Then what is the matter?" she asked, in surprise ; "why did you not let me know that you were returned from exile?"

"Better, perhaps, not have returned at all," replied Seymour, in a grave tone.

"Oh, Seymour !" exclaimed Arabella. But at that moment, a door on the other side of the passage opened, giving admission to some servants carrying plates and dishes from the banqueting-room ; and Arabella, fearful of being recognised, hurried forward, and joined the Queen upon the terrace.

She found that almost every lady had resumed her mask, on the pretence, common in that day, of guarding her complexion from the air. The company had broken up into various groups, and were scattered over the grounds in the moonlight, the liberty with which Anne of Denmark encouraged in the court ; and as soon as the Queen saw Arabella, she exclaimed, "Away, away, my pretty cousin ! Find thee a mate for the evening. We have cast off royal restraints, and for the next hour are as free as the wind."

Arabella looked round, but the mate whom her heart would have fondly sought for that hour, or for the whole of life, was not near ; and, fixing hastily upon good Sir Harry West, she advanced to the place where he stood, saying, "Come, my dear good friend, the Queen wills that I choose a partner for the evening's gossip, and so I will inflict myself on you."

"Alas, lady," replied the old knight, walking on by her side, "you might have chosen a younger and a gayer heart."

"A younger, but not a gayer," replied Arabella, in a cheerful tone ; "for we will be as merry as skylarks together. What is there in the world worth being sad about?"

—When one has found out that love sooner or later waxes cold; that hope goes out at last like an exhausted lamp; that courtesy has its changes, like every other fashion; that temperance and soberness can give up their place among the virtues to drunkenness and excess—what is there in the world sufficiently valuable to make us give it a sigh when we see it passing away?"

"Right gloomy merriment, dear lady?" answered the knight, with a shake of the head; "but yet not of the sort that falls upon old age. The shade upon you is but that cast by some passing cloud, not the grey twilight of declining day.—What has happened? Has your bird got out of the cage, and flown away?"

"No," replied Arabella, quickly, "he has come back again and pecked my hand.—But here hurries Lord Rochester.—In pity leave me not.—Ha! who is that sweet lady joins him now, and hangs upon his arm?" she continued speaking to herself. "Many thanks, fair dame!—many thanks for keeping him from me.—I pray thee hold him fast—and she does too! Who can that be, Sir Harry?"

"The Countess of Essex, I think," answered the knight.

"Oh no," replied Arabella, "she had on a robe of amber and silver—that is dark blue or green, I think."

"She has had time to change it," said the knight, "and she it certainly is. That queenly, yet impetuous step is not to be mistaken, nor that glorious form, harbouring—what?"

"I know not," replied Arabella; "we are but little acquainted."

"Ay, who shall say?" rejoined Sir Harry West, "at eighteen, who shall say, whether it be angel or devil? for the fallen Morning Star shone once as bright as the best in heaven."

"Fie, fie, Sir Harry!" cried Arabella. "I thought that beauty now-a-days was the great good, the pledge and warrant of celestial excellence—who ever speaks of aught but beauty? If a lover would please me, he fixes on my fine points, as a jockey describing his horse. My eyes are certain to put out the stars. It is my lip that makes the roses blush with envy. Pearls have quite lost their price, since my teeth came to court; and sculptors are quite ruined in alabaster, trying to imitate my skin. Fie, fie, Sir Harry! If she be beautiful, she must be an angel."

"She has not made her husband think so," replied Sir Harry West. "But here comes another to join us—my young friend, William Seymour. Will you fly from him, too, lady? or shall I leave you to his care?"

"Nay, stay," cried Arabella, eagerly — too eagerly; "stay, I beseech you."

Was it her heart spoke? Yes, reader; or rather the agitation that was in it. She feared herself at that moment—she feared to be left alone with him she loved the best, at a time when her thoughts were all in confusion—when her bosom was full of emotion, lest she should say or do something rashly that could never be recalled. In another instant, however, Seymour was by her side; but he, too, was agitated; and though she had hidden, under her gay speeches to Sir Harry West, the struggling sensation within her, she could do so no longer, with her lover by her side. Thus, the few sentences first spoken on both parts were incoherent—almost unintelligible.

The old knight came to their aid, however, asking his young friend, in a quiet, conversational tone, when he had returned.

"But yesterday," replied William Seymour. "One fortnight ago, I received the King's permission to come back; and, setting off next morning, I have since ridden post through France and part of Italy, taking not much time, as you may suppose, to admire the beauties of the road."

"No, good faith, my young friend," replied Sir Harry West, "nor to give yourself much repose either."

"True," answered Seymour, with a sigh; "I sought no repose. I was winged with hope and expectation—going back to my native land, to all I loved the best, in the full confidence of finding hearts unchanged, and affections the same. But it was a boy-like error, Sir Harry. The first rumour that met me showed that time, as well as fortune, changes favour; and all that I have seen this night, makes me think that everything on earth is, as the Jewish King has said, lighter than vanity."

"Something like your own complaint, sweet lady," said Sir Harry West; "a moment ago you were painting the world in the same gloomy colours."

"I said," replied Arabella, "that there is nothing on earth worth sighing for—and, in truth, I think so still; for the events we long for most eagerly, generally end in disappointment or anguish."

"Well, then, you are both agreed, it seems," said Sir Harry West. "'Tis strange that you should come to the same conclusion on the same night."

"Sir Harry, Sir Harry!" cried a voice from the terrace above; "his Majesty wishes to speak with you. You must give judgment between him and the Ambassador from Florence on a passage in Dante, which his Excellency

pretends he can translate into English better than his Majesty."

"Now, heaven defend me!" exclaimed the old knight. "Would that the moon had not lighted them to look for me. But I must leave the lady under your charge, Seymour," and away he sped, while Arabella stood hesitating for a moment, whether to accompany him or not.

But woman's heart is always willing to leave a door open for reconciliation, and though she said, "I think we had better follow to the terrace," she took no step that way.

"As you please, lady," replied Seymour, without moving in that direction.

Arabella turned round to go; but love conquered, and pausing suddenly, she said, "No! The opportunity may never come again, and it shall not be said, that I resented the first unkindness of a rash man. We will go the other way."

"Unkindness, Arabella!" cried Seymour. "'Tis not I am unkind."

"Then you would say, it is I?" exclaimed Arabella.

"Nay," replied Seymour, in a sad tone, "I do not say so. I have no title to charge you with unkindness. What right have I to expect that you should remember me through several long years; that you should neglect happier men with fairer fortunes, for the sake of one whom you once condescended—may I say it now-a-days?—to love."

"What right?" said Arabella. "Oh, Seymour, do you ask me what right? I might as well inquire of my own heart what right I have to feel this anguish, when I see him to whom all my thoughts have been given for years—for whose return I have looked with anxious hope and longing, till delay did, indeed, make the heart sick, come back at length cold and indifferent as if we had scarcely ever met. But I make no such foolish inquiries. I have a right, the right of true affection, the right of pledged and plighted faith, the right, if you will, of sorrow and suffering—and by that right, I ask you, William Seymour, what is it that has changed you thus?"

"Nay, Arabella," he replied, "'tis not I am changed—'tis you."

"Hush," she said, "here are people coming near;" but the other group passed without noticing them; and she then added, "I will be coarse with you, Seymour, and speak boldly, what no man, I think, would dare to say, that you tell a falsehood. I am not changed."

"Oh, prove it to me!" cried Seymour, "and I will say

it is the sweetest insult ever I received. Is it not true, then, that you encourage this minion of the King, this raw untutored Scot, whose woman face and glittering apparel has turned all heads, it seems, and perverted all hearts."

"I!" exclaimed Arabella, "I encourage him! Is it possible that that mad-headed passion, jealousy, should so far take possession of a sober-minded man, as to make him forget everything he has known of one, whose heart he once pretended to think the most valuable thing he could possess on earth? Oh, if that heart could be so hollow and so false, what an empty, valueless gewgaw it would be! Come, I forgive thee, Seymour; if the yellow fiend has got thee in his hands, he has tormented thee too much already for me to add one punishment more. But I will have full confession by whom, by what, where, and how, came this outrageous fancy in thy head, my friend."

"That is told at once," exclaimed her lover. "I heard it last night in London, from my brother. I saw the man his night beside you with my eyes."

"Ay," replied the lady; "and might have seen, too, if you had used them well, poor Arabella nearly fainting, when she caught the face of an ungrateful man gazing at her from the far end of the hall. I will not tell you it was with joy—it might be with fear, you know. Your wife, your pledged and plighted wife, might well tremble and turn pale, and nearly sink upon the ground, when you detected her listening to sweet words from the King's fluttering favourite. Think so, Seymour—think so, if you can! But hark! here are steps coming—Sir Harry West—we must break off."

"But how—tell me how," cried Seymour, "I can see you again—how write to you?"

"See me?" replied Arabella, hastily; "I know not; chance and fortune must favour us. But as to writing, you may trust Ida Mara with anything."

"Ida Mara!—who is she?" asked her lover.

"One of my gentlewomen," replied Arabella, in a gay tone; "the only one, indeed, except two little maids that wait on her and me. But here is Sir Harry West," she continued, turning towards the old knight as he approached, "he will tell you more about her, for on my truth I think the girl is in love with him, and he with her. Is it not so, Sir Harry?—we speak of Ida Mara."

Good Sir Harry West made no denial of the fact, but told the lady that the Queen was about to retire; and Arabella followed him towards the terrace; but, as she went, she took care that Seymour should have so full a descrip-

tion of the fair Italian, that he could find no difficulty in distinguishing her from the other attendants at the court. Walking by her side, he crossed the terrace with her towards the Queen, but took his leave before she joined the royal circle, and was soon lost to her sight amongst the various groups that were scattered over the ground.

The court and the courtiers still, for several hours, prolonged their revels in the halls of Theobalds; and cups of wine were drunk, and scenes of folly enacted, which I will not pause to enumerate or describe. Laughter and song, and gaming, and many a vice, and many an absurdity, had there to take place, before morning; but for Arabella Stuart the day ended with the walk in the gardens.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE reader does not require to be informed, that the aspect of London in those days was very different from that which it shows at present. The great fire had not yet swept away that foul nest of narrow streets and tall houses, in which the plague lingered, almost as pertinaciously as in the lanes of an Oriental city; nor had the increasing population yet spread itself over the fields, or swallowed up the villages, by which the great metropolis of England was surrounded in former times, but which have been gradually covered with the mansions of succeeding races of the fashionable world, and fringed by the snug villas of commercial men, till the town is so gradually blended with the country, that it is scarcely possible to say where the one ends and the other begins.

Those large squares which have retained, in some instances to the present day, the name of fields, were then fields indeed. Boys and girls went a-Maying where balls and suppers are now held; and within about a quarter of a mile of Lincoln's Inn, a small, tall-chimneyed house, four stories high on one side, and two on another, with a round tower of brick-work added to contain the staircase, which seemed to have been forgotten in the original construction, rose in the midst of a garden, very near the spot where gentlemen in curious wigs and black gowns now hurry about to plead the cause of the rich, but not in general of the poor, if they can help it.

At the garden-gate of this house, in the beginning of August, a coach stopped one day about three of the clock, and two ladies, with the usual masks on their faces, de-

scended, and walked with a quick pace towards the door in the round tower. Before they reached it, however, that door was opened by the small page whom we have seen accompanying Master Weston, otherwise Doctor Foreman, and who, when at home, had the office, which he performed most acutely, of looking through a small loophole in the tower, to examine strictly all the personages who approached the Doctor's house.

Without any question, the two ladies walked straight up stairs, and, tapping at the door on the second floor, were answered by a voice from within which bade them enter. The shorter and stouter immediately lifted the latch, and then drew back, to suffer her taller and more graceful companion to pass. The other lady did so, and, advancing straight to the table, touched the worthy Doctor Foreman on the shoulder, without, however, prevailing upon him to raise his head from some strange and extraordinary figures, which he was tracing with a pen upon a slip of parchment. His gay and glittering attire, as a foreign cavalier, had now been cast aside, and he was robed in a black gown trimmed with fur, having a small velvet cap upon his head. So profoundly busy did he seem, that all he replied, when the Countess of Essex touched him, was "Enter—enter, why do you not come in?"

"The man's mad," cried the Countess.

"No, no," replied Mrs. Turner; "does not your Ladyship see that he is abstracted? You must let him finish what he is about; your own fate may depend upon it, for aught you know."

With this warning the Countess stood silent; but her impatient spirit still moved her to keep beating the ground with her small foot, till at length Dr. Foreman exclaimed, as he drew two more new figures at the bottom of the vellum—"Gimmel, Alsaneth;" and then looked round, as if in surprise to see any one in the room but himself. As soon as he perceived—or appeared to perceive—the Countess, he started up, exclaiming, "Bless me, beautiful Lady! I beg your Ladyship's pardon. Pray be seated. What is the news with you? 'Tis long since I have had the honour of seeing you. Has all gone according to your wish?"

"Good faith, no: much to the contrary," replied the Countess, seating herself, and taking off her mask;—and here it is to be remarked that a great change had come over her, in her demeanour to the respectable Doctor Foreman, since first she was introduced to that worthy and scientific person. She had now seen him several times;

all shame and reserve had been cast off; her criminal love and its object were fully avowed; and, entangled in the snares of the impostor and his unprincipled associate, she was ready to engage in any rash act, however disgraceful, to accomplish her dark and vicious purposes. Nor let the reader for one moment doubt the truth of these assertions; let him not, filled with the notions and enlightened by the knowledge of the present day, ask himself if it be possible that a lady, of the highest rank and education of the time, could be the dupe of such a charlatan, and so low and infamous a woman. Let him not suppose that the tale is invented or embellished by the writer; for it is absolutely true, and stands based upon the evidence given before a court of justice. There may be, indeed, particulars still more gross than any here detailed—views still more wicked—follics still more flagrant—for much must be suppressed that would offend a pure and delicate mind—but let it be remembered that all these scenes are rather undercoloured than overcharged.

"I thought at one time, indeed," continued the Countess, "that your art was having its effect, for I met him at Theobalds, and, for the first time, saw something like the light of love in his eyes. But all has gone wrong since I returned to London. My father insists that I shall go home to that hateful wretch, to whom I am tied by such cruel bonds; and, if I do so, I shall die of grief and despair."

"Madam," said the Doctor, "I grieve for you deeply, but it is not in my power to control destiny. All that I told you was, that by the use of certain powders and drugs, such as William Shakespeare speaks of in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, where he says—

'The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid,
Will make a man or woman madly doat
Upon the next live creature that it sees,'

I can change hate or indifference into love, and love into hate, so that he who now cares nought for you, may soon be at your feet, and he who now loves you, may soon be as cold as ice."

"Then give me some—give me some of the latter," she cried, eagerly, "that I may mix it with all the food of this half-husband of mine, that he may learn to detest me as I detest him. Would he but consent, the iron bond between us might soon be broken; but I cannot take the ways that other women would to win my purpose. If I persuade and soothe, it will but waken his love the more."

"No, no," said Foreman, "you must not do that!—You

must repel him coldly—show your dislike—look as if you loathed his sight."

"That were no great effort," cried the Countess; "it is my daily food to hate him.—But hark! there is a noise. Look out, Turner, look out."

"Half-a-dozen gentlemen, as I live," exclaimed Mrs. Turner, "coming straight along the path towards the house too.—I do believe they are gentlemen of my Lord of Suffolk, your noble father, lady.—Yes, there is Sir John Walters, as I live! Have you no hiding place, Doctor!"

"'Twere useless—'twere useless," answered the Countess, with a look of disdain; "the coach is at the gate; and I am not a baby, to be frightened at the look of my father's gentlemen. Come, quick, sirrah, give me some of that powder of hate you talk of."

"We weigh it, madam," said Foreman, hesitating, "at the rate of one gold noble per grain, but a small portion goes a great way."

"There, give me plenty," she cried, throwing a purse upon the table; and Foreman, taking it up, hurried to a little cabinet at the side, and took out several small packets.

At the same instant, the impostor's boy knocked at the door of the room; and the Countess exclaimed boldly, "Come in."

"There be six gentlemen at the door," he said, "inquiring if the Countess of Essex be here?"

"Tell them she is," replied the Countess, "and if they want her, they must wait her pleasure below.—Come, sir, is that ready?"

"It is, madam," said the Doctor, giving her the powders.

"Ha!" exclaimed she, gazing at them with a triumphant smile, "if these will make him hate me, he shall soon have them all, though it drove him well nigh to murder me. Oh! if I could but make him strike me! Now, sir, to you I must leave the task of working upon Lord Rochester; he is now in London, and you can easily find means——"

"Fear not, madam, fear not," replied the impostor, who heard a heavy step upon the stairs; and, to say the truth, was anxious to get rid of his fair guest, for fear of inquiries not the most profitable to him. "Fear not, madam; I will so manage it, that——"

"The gentlemen will come up!" cried the boy, thrusting in his head. The moment after, he was pushed aside; and a stout middle-aged man entered, on whom the bright eyes of the Countess flashed living fire.

"How dare you, Sir John Walters," she exclaimed, "intrude upon me in this manner?"

"I have your father's orders, my Lady," replied Sir John, "to bring you to him directly. He has something of importance to communicate."

"Well, sir," said the Countess, "I suppose I must obey; but be you sure that I will soon break through this tutelage;" and, passing him with a look of angry disdain, she descended the stairs, walked through the midst of the gentlemen at the door, without noticing any of them, and entered her coach.

The vehicle was driven immediately to the house of the Earl of Suffolk; and an angry spot was still upon the cheek of the fair Countess when she entered her father's gates. Fear and timidity were not in her nature; and she walked at once to the room where she expected to find him. She was surprised, however, and somewhat dismayed, it must be confessed, not only to behold her two parents, but her sister and the Earl of Essex. Her mother was in tears, and her father's brow stern and dark, while her husband stood with his arms folded on his chest, looking sad, rather than out of temper.

Passing him by, without the slightest notice, Lady Essex advanced straight towards her father, saying, "You sent for me, sir?"

"I did, Frances," he replied; "it was to let you know my will. Here stands your husband, madam, to whose house you have refused to go, on one pretence or another, ever since he returned to England to claim you as his bride. I beseech you, my child, in courteous decency, to give your hand to this noble gentleman, and let him lead you home;—for this is your home no longer."

"I dare say, my Lord," replied the Countess, unabashed, "that I could find another without troubling him."

"You see," cried her father,—"bear witness all, that no remonstrance or parental solicitation has any effect! Now, madam, here! The coach, which is to convey you with your husband to his seat of Chartley, is at the door: your wardrobe is packed up to follow. From this room you go to that conveyance.—Nay, not a word; for, if you walk not soberly, you shall be compelled; and down to Chartley with what grace you may. I trust that, ere I see your face again, a change will be wrought in your heart, and that I shall be enabled to welcome back the daughter gladly, whom I now part with in displeasure."

Lady Essex made a great effort to speak; but it was in vain; and she burst into a passionate flood of tears.

"Come, lady," said Lord Essex, in a gentle tone, taking her hand, "believe me I will do all that man can do to win your love, and to secure your happiness."

"You can do neither, sir!" replied the Countess; "but I am your slave, it seems. Have you no chains ready? Let us go!" and, without bidding adieu to any one, she walked straight to the door.

We will pass over the journey to Chartley, the cold hatred with which she repelled her husband's love by the way, and the first week of their sojourn at that beautiful seat.

It was on the evening of a bright day in the same month, while the whole world was looking gay and cheerful without, that the Earl entered his wife's drawing-room, where all was dark and gloomy. The windows were closed, the curtains drawn; for she had never suffered them to be opened since her arrival. A single lamp stood upon the table; and by its faint light the Countess sat and wept. She raised neither her head nor her eyes when the step of her husband sounded in the chamber, but continued fixed and motionless, like a beautiful statue representing angry grief. Lord Essex drew a seat to the other side of the table, and, sitting down, gazed at her for a moment or two in silence.

"Dry your tears, madam," he said at length.

"That is at least a privilege you cannot take from me, sir," she replied. "When in my childhood, now six years ago, I took a vow I did not understand, I never promised not to weep."

"Dry your tears, I say, madam!" he rejoined, in a tone both of sternness and sadness; "for the cause of their flowing is about to be removed."

The Countess started, and looked up.

"I will claim your attention for a moment," he continued; "and you shall hear the result of some consideration. You and I were married at an early age, as the custom is——"

"It is a bad one," said the Countess. "Go on."

"But if you were not capable," continued her husband, "of loving and esteeming at that age, I was; and I returned to England to claim you, full of affection, which, as you may suppose, was not diminished when I saw your beauty. I have now been here nearly two months; and I have tried, by every means within man's power, to win you to return the attachment I have felt. The effort has proved vain. I have learned to know that you are unworthy of my love; that, instead of that fair form containing a heart and mind as soft and beautiful as your looks, there is nothing within but a proud, angry spirit—selfish, and cold, and fierce;—a loathsome thing, that makes the glittering casket in which it is enshrined all poor and valueless. I therefore

cast you off, madam; or, as you will term it, set you free to go whithersoever you will—to do whatsoever you please. Your uncle, of Northampton, will receive you, for my good Lord, your father, will not. From me you shall enjoy such an income as may befit the Countess of Essex. I give it in honour of my own name, and trust—but faintly—that you will never disgrace it. To-morrow, at day-break, your equipage will be at the door to convey you back to London. You came down hither with me against your will; but, if I were to go back again with you, it would be against my own.”

“Oh, joy, joy!” cried the Countess, starting up and clasping her hands. “I am a slave no longer!”

Her husband gave her one look of scorn and reprobation, and quitted the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

SHAKESPEARE assured his hearers, in the age of which we are now writing, “the course of true love never did run smooth,” and the assertion is certainly as true as a proverb. When Arabella Stuart retired to her chamber for the night, her heart was relieved of part of the load which her lover’s apparently strange conduct had brought upon it; yet sufficient anxiety and grief remained in her mind, to give her ample subject for thought and sorrowful meditation. She was still a little angry, it must be confessed, that Seymour should even have doubted her—her, whose whole thoughts and affections had been with him during his absence. But yet, perhaps, there might be a certain sort of gratification, too, in her bosom, to see that his love for her still remained so powerful, that the least apprehension of losing her should change his whole nature, and render one, so uniformly kind, tender, and ardent,—cold, discourteous, and repulsive. It was a little triumph of its sort, which even Arabella’s heart could not but be pleased with.

Hers, however, was not a character either to retain such anger, or enjoy such triumph long; and the whole was soon swallowed up in joy at his return, and grief for the uneasiness he had suffered. The more painful part of her contemplations referred to the rumours which he had heard; and she asked herself with fear,—what if the King should have given encouragement to his favourite to pursue the suit for her hand?—what would be her fate if James, won to the views of Rochester, should insist upon her ac-

cepting him as her husband? How could such rumours get abroad? she inquired likewise, unless some much more marked approbation of Rochester's ambition than any of her own acts had given, had been received from a quarter where will and authority went together?

Women, however, have generally a happy art of putting aside the consideration of painful probabilities. They have much greater faith in the influence of time and accident in removing obstacles and averting dangers than men; and Arabella consoled herself with the hope of seeing William Seymour on the following morning, and enjoying an interview, however short, during which all clouds would be swept away, and their whole hearts opened to each other as before.

Such expectations were strengthened ere she retired to rest. Ida Mara, who had not been in her chamber when she first returned, appeared not long after, while one of the maids was combing their lady's beautiful long hair, and standing beside her, as was her wont when she was at her toilet, talked gaily of all the pageants which Lord Salisbury's mansion had presented during the day, and described the hall, through which she had just passed, as displaying a lamentable, yet ludicrous, scene of drunkenness and folly.

When the lady was undressed, she told her attendants to leave her as usual to her prayers; but the pretty Italian girl begged leave to remain a moment, saying that she had something to tell her mistress; and the moment the two maids were gone, she took a note from her bosom, and put it into Arabella's hand.

"Dear lady," she cried at the same time, "do you know that the gentleman who, with Sir Lewis Lewkenor, escorted you to Wilton long, long ago, has come back again? I found him standing at the bottom of the stairs just now; and, the moment he saw me, he asked if my name was not Ida Mara, and then gave me that note, with directions to deliver it when you were alone. Oh, you will be so glad to see him!"

"How know you that, Ida Mara?" exclaimed Arabella, with a smile.

"Because you wept when he went away," replied the girl, archly, "and have sighed ever since, when I talked to you of Italy."

"Well, Ida Mara," answered her mistress, "you must tell no one that I wept when he went away, for it might be dangerous to him and to me."

"Then I would die first," cried the girl; and Arabella, opening the note, read a few hasty lines from William

Seymour, beseeching her to walk early in the park on the following morning, before the rest of the court was stirring. "I have a thousand things to say," continued Seymour, "a thousand things to tell, a thousand things to ask forgiveness for."

Arabella's heart fluttered; for, although she had no hesitation,—though she looked upon herself as bound to him by every tie, and believed that she had no right to refuse any reasonable request, yet there was something in the idea of purposely going out to meet him, which agitated, if it did not alarm her.

Telling Ida Mara to wake her early, she retired to rest; but little sleep did poor Arabella gain that night, and by daybreak on the following morning she was up and at her toilet. Scarcely had she commenced, however, when Ida Mara entered, informing her that the whole court was on foot, the King having been ill in the night, and about to set out immediately for London.

The lady finished dressing herself in haste, and descending the stairs, went out by the small postern door opening upon the terrace. Leaving that exposed spot as soon as she could, she proceeded by a flight of steps into the garden below, and thence, by a long straight walk, towards a long avenue, which, though now long cut down, was in those days one of the greatest ornaments of the place. A step behind her soon caught her car; and the next instant Seymour was by her side. But she had only time to learn that, there being no room in the house, he was lodged in one of the villages near, and to tell him that all were in the hurry of departure at the court, when two Scotch gentlemen, named Ramsay and Morton, appeared in the avenue, and Arabella exclaimed eagerly, "We must part, Seymour, for the present. Call often at Shrewsbury House; for if I have anything to tell, I will leave a letter there for you. My aunt is all kindness, and in part knows what is between us."

"Then I can communicate with you, there," cried Seymour.

"Yes, yes," replied Arabella. "Farewell, farewell;" and she left him.

Had they been wise and practised in such meetings, instead of parting and each turning back by a separate path—a proceeding which might plainly indicate to any who watched them, that they had come thither by agreement, and returned as soon as they had said what they wished to communicate—William Seymour would have walked on towards the house, and Arabella would have pursued her

ramble, leaving those who saw them to suppose that they had met accidentally.

They did not follow this plan, however, and their meeting was accordingly marked and reported afterwards; for there was nothing in which James found greater delight, than in learning all the secrets, and investigating the private affairs, of those by whom he was surrounded; and his courtiers took ample care to feed his appetite for this sort of information with all the gossip of the court.

From Theobalds to London, and from London to Hampton Court, Arabella accompanied the Queen, with the interval of but one day; and during the whole of the following week, she had no opportunity of seeing her lover; for, without any apparent cause, events always took such a turn as to prevent her from visiting London, even for an hour, as she had proposed. She knew not how or why, but it seemed to her that she was watched; nay, more, that her actions were overruled, without any apparent stretch of authority. Wherever she proposed to go during the day, a message from the Queen called her in another direction; and if she walked out alone, she was sure to see some one at a distance, walking step by step within view.

She tried to persuade herself that all this was accidental, and that it was but the consciousness of her own wishes which made her suspect other people had remarked them. But she was not allowed to remain long in such a belief; for one morning, before she joined the Queen, Ida Mara came into her chamber with her cheek glowing, and her bright eyes full of light; and, sinking down on her knees beside her mistress, she cried, "Oh, lady, lady dear, they wish me to betray you—to be a spy upon you. That Sir Lewis Lewkenor sent for me this morning, and commanded me, in the name of the King, to give him information daily of all that you do."

Arabella turned somewhat pale;—"And what did you say, Ida Mara?" she asked.

"I said at first, like a fool," replied the girl, "that I was your servant, and not the King's. But I was sorry for it afterwards; for I thought that if I showed them that they would get no tidings from me, they might apply to some one else; so then I said as quietly as I could, that I knew not there was anything to tell."

"What answered he to that?" demanded Arabella.

"Why he asked," replied the girl, "if Mr. Seymour had been to visit you since he returned. I said boldly, No, as well I might; and he then repeated that I must bring him

intelligence every day ; and, having by this time bethought myself of what was best to do, I made him a low courtesy, saying, that I trusted if I were to have such an office, I should have some wages for it, otherwise I could not undertake it. He replied that I should be well paid ; and I answered that it must not be like the officers of state who get their money when and how they can : that I was too poor to wait. Whereupon he gave me a rose noble, which I have got here."

Arabella shook her head. "I fear, Ida Mara," she said, "by taking the man's money, you have committed yourself to give him information."

"Oh, he shall have it, he shall have it," cried Ida Mara, "as much as he can desire. He shall know every gown you have put on, and how many times you change your shoes, and what you say to your tailor when he brings home your new suit. There shall not be a trifle of such a kind that he shall not know."

"But if he questions you of other things?" asked Arabella.

"Oh, leave me to answer him, dear lady," cried the girl, "and be you assured, that not one thing which you would keep secret shall he ever discover from my lips. I will guard yours better than my own ; and, as he talks to me in villanous Italian, I shall have no difficulty in leading his wit astray. But hark! there is some one knocks at the door."

"See who it is," replied Arabella, in some agitation ; "it is terrible to be thus spied upon."

Ida Mara rose and went to the door of the chamber, which was in a deep recess, leading from one of the towers, in which the room was situated, to the main body of the building. The Italian girl opened the door, and looked out upon the stairs, when, drawing back for a moment, she turned an inquiring glance towards her mistress, to which Arabella could make no reply, as she knew not who was there.

The girl then, acting upon her own judgment, opened the door wide, without uttering a word ; and with a light step, William Seymour entered the room, Ida Mara quitting it at the same time.

Arabella rose and sprang towards him ; but before he could hold her to his heart for a moment, she exclaimed, "Seymour, dear Seymour, you must not stay—nay, not an instant! We are watched; suspicion is aroused; and we may be both ruined if you remain. I can bear this no longer. I will find means to quit the court within a few days. In the meanwhile, I will write to you, and tell you all that has happened. But now, you must leave me.

Indeed, indeed you must!—Nay, surely you have no jealousy of Arabella now?"

"None, none, dearest," he cried, "but all I fear is, that they may persecute you to wed this man."

"They would not succeed," answered Arabella; "besides, he seems to have quitted the pursuit. I have seen nothing of him since we were here. We have not exchanged a word for the last week.—But leave me, Seymour, leave me, in pity.—You may frustrate your own hopes."

"I must at least give you this letter from my Lord of Shrewsbury," said Seymour. "Hearing that I was coming hither, he charged me with it; but I know not what it contains."

"Well, well, I will read it afterwards," answered the lady. "Now, Seymour, now you must go; but as you have been seen here, you had better present yourself at the court."

"I will," he answered, "I will. . Adieu, then, dearest, if it must be so;" and he left her.

Scarcely had he quitted the room, however, when some one again knocked at the door, and, without much ceremony, entered, before the lady had broken the seal of her uncle's letter. She was not a little surprised, as she looked up, to see one of the keepers of the Council Chamber, who advanced towards her with a low bow.

"What would you with me, sir?" she asked.

"The King, madam," he replied, "requires your Ladyship's presence before the Council."

Arabella turned pale; but there was no means of avoiding whatever was before her; and she replied at once, "I am ready to accompany you, sir. Pray call my gentlewoman from the room on the left."

The keeper obeyed; and Arabella, after covering her head with a veil, put her arm through that of Ida Mara, and followed the keeper to the royal apartments.

In the ante-room to the council-chamber, her guide asked her to wait for a moment, and opening the door, went in. As he did so, she heard her lover's voice, answering aloud, "I carried her a letter from the Earl of Shrewsbury, your Majesty."

The next moment the keeper again appeared, and ushered her into the presence of the King. James was seated at the head of the table, with a black velvet hat, looped with a large emerald, on his head, and three or four noblemen, bare-headed, on his right hand and on his left. The moment he beheld Arabella, he said, with the broad Scottish accent which he never lost, "Put the lady a chair, sirrah.

Now, young gentleman, answer me again—and mind that you tell me the truth, for there were eyes upon you, sir,—there were eyes upon you. How long did you stay upon this visit?”

“I have no desire, your Majesty,” replied Seymour, with some haughtiness in his tone, “to speak aught but the truth; it is not my custom. I might have stayed with the Lady Arabella some two minutes and a half, or three minutes.”

“The man says five, sir,” cried the King.

“About five, your Majesty,” said one of the councillors; “he is not precise.”

“It may have been five, sire,” answered Seymour, slightly smiling; “pleasant society makes the time pass quick, and unpleasant things will make it seem tardy—methinks I have been here an hour.”

“As bold as ever I see,” cried the King; “you will make yourself a hot nest of it, sir, if you go on at this rate. “When did you visit the Lady Arabella before?”

“Some years ago, sir,” replied William Seymour, “and then by your Majesty’s command.”

“Do you mean to say, sir,” asked the King, “that you have not seen her since you had our gracious permission to return?”

“Seen her I have, your Majesty,” replied Seymour, “at Theobalds, the night of the masque; and on the following morning I met her as she was walking in the park. She is herself witness, however, that I did not then detain her long; and I protest, upon my honour, that I have never visited her since my return, except on this one occasion, when I carried her the letter of my Lord Shrewsbury. Then I stayed not longer than any gentleman might be expected to do in common courtesy—not knowing,” he added, bitterly, “that there was a spy at my heels;” and he went on in a murmur to himself, “I would have cut off his ears, if I had.”

“Sir, you speak rashly and unadvisedly,” replied the King: “spies are necessary in all civilised states, and not to be lighted by such gallants as you. It is in some sort, sir, an holy ordinance. Did not Joshua the prophet send out spies, who were received by that excellent woman Rahab, the harlot, who let them down secretly from the wall? and it is right that Kings and Judges should be informed, by discreet and dutiful subjects, of all that is taking place around them, especially in what concerns their near relations, sirrah. You hear, madam, what this gentleman says; and I charge you, upon your allegiance, to tell me if it be true?”

"Perfectly, sire," said Arabella, in a low voice, "as far as I have heard it.—He brought me a letter from my uncle of Shrewsbury."

"Ay, is it even so?" cried the King; "you both sing the same song; but I would fain see this letter."

Arabella hesitated. She knew not what her uncle might have said. Besides the risk of his alluding to the messenger in such a way as might excite suspicion, there was many a jest current upon the manners of the court which might not be very well fitted for the King's eye; and, holding the letter in her hand, she replied, "This was not written, sir, to be made public. I should think the letter of an uncle to his niece might be——"

"Hout, nonsense!" cried James. "Is not a King God's Vicegerent upon earth, and above all uncles or fathers either? Is he not Pater Patriæ? I command you, madam, lay the letter on the board."

Arabella did so with a trembling hand; and one of the Councillors handed it to the King, who took it and examined it closely.

"It cannot have been falsified," he said, "for the seal is not broken."

He then, without ceremony, opened it, and read aloud, making his usual comments as he did so.

"My sweet niece," it proceeded, "'your good aunt and I are about soon to go to our place called Malvoisy, in Buckinghamshire; and we would fain have you with us, if you can get the King's permission to come, not as much for own sakes, to have the company of an idle girl, whom we do not love, as for yours, to get you out of the foul and unsavoury atmosphere of a court, where, from all we hear, you are likely to be quite corrupted by bad example.'

"Heard you ever the like of that!" cried the King, laughing till the tears ran over his cheeks.

"I do not know," he proceeded, reading Lord Shrewsbury's letter, "'whether you, too, my niece, were as drunk as the rest at Theobalds. I hope not; for if you were, your head must have ached the next morning; but I do hear that his Majesty of Denmark emptied two pottles and a half of heavy Burgundy after the repast, and our great King the same.'

"The false loon!" cried the King, with a tremendous oath, "I declare, he's like a dishonest tapster, and put down three gills too much to my score. But we will see further," and he went on to read,—"'and our great King the same. But happily for the state, his brains are too good to swim with any quantity of wine; and so he 'scaped falling, though I hear, in the contest, Burgundy overthrew

Denmark. However, if you would come with us, and live in quiet for a time, seeing none but your aunt and me, wheedle his Majesty, as you know how, and join us here to-morrow or the next day. I shall send this by Sir John Harrington—that merry soul. Yours, as you shall behave yourself,
 ‘SHREWSBURY.’

“‘Postscriptum. William Seymour has just come in; and he goes down to Hampton Court to-morrow;—I give him charge of this letter.’

“Ha!” cried the King, “by my soul, though he puts his fingers somewhat too near Majesty, he knows how to do so with distinctions, this good Earl of Shrewsbury; and a wise and sapient man he is, if he had but a little knowledge of the Greek tongue, in respect of which he is illiterate, as I once proved. But of that more hereafter. I cannot but say, lady, that it might be as well for you to accept your uncle’s invitation.”

“I shall do so most willingly, your Majesty,” replied Arabella, “and the more, from the perfect solitude he promises me. The court has been so thronged of late, that I feel as if I had been living in a crowd, and shall be glad to see the air thinner of human beings.”

“Well, so shall it be then,” said James; “and you shall have our full leave and royal permission to spend a fortnight, or perchance a month, with your good uncle at his manor at Malvoisie. But before either of you depart, remember, for the future, that we will have no love passages.—Ay, madam, you may redden, but we may know more than perhaps we choose to say. We have our own views with regard to the disposal of your hand, which shall be announced to you in due time; and we shall expect to find you duly obedient and complying. You, sir, too, will understand us; and if you proceed further with any follies you may have gotten into your head, you will incur our heavy displeasure, which is not a light matter for any man to bear. So be wise, if wisdom can enter into so young a pate. Now you may retire, sir.”

Seymour bowed, and withdrew; and, to say the truth, had not the matter so much affected his happiness, he might have inclined to laugh at the reprimand of the King. James’s broad Scottish accent, which sounded uncouth enough in his moments of uproarious jocularity, became even more ludicrous when delivering any of his solemn harangues, especially as he had an inveterate habit of interlarding, even his most studied sentences, with the peculiar idioms and phraseology of his own nation, and with illus-

trations often the most homely and absurd—and often the most profane, not to say blasphemous. To these we cannot attempt to do justice; but it is well known that the sudden utterance of such words and figures, in the midst of an oration delivered with mock majesty and solemnity, has overset the gravity even of an indignant House of Commons, and caused the members to shrink behind each other, lest their laughter should be too apparent.

Arabella remained before the council, in anxious expectation of what was to come next; but, much to her gratification, as the King was commencing a long admonition, he was drawn away by some word which he himself made use of—we believe it was *callant*—to enter into a tedious discussion upon the derivation thereof, which occupied him for the space of nearly twenty minutes, at the end of which time he dismissed her, without returning to the original subject.

Retiring gladly to her own chamber, the lady gave way to the feelings she had feared to display before the eyes of the heartless monarch and his cold councillors. The storm had passed away for the time, but it left clouds behind it; and though she felt relieved, there was enough of agitation and apprehension remaining to bring the tears into her eyes.

CHAPTER XXIII.

As with the ancient walls of palaces and halls, as with the dungeon and the court of law—so with the old hawthorn tree of the wide chase, the yew tree of the churchyard, or the broad oak of the park:—many a tale could be told by the silent witnesses of man's passions, joys, and sufferings, had they but a voice to speak that which they have seen; and how instructive might the homily be, if, as we have reason to believe, vice seldom goes without its punishment on earth, though virtue may have to look to Heaven for its reward!

In the wildest part of that tract of ground called Bushy Park, which, in the days we speak of, showed far less trace of man's handywork than at present, amidst fern and white-thorn, and starting deer, walked along a lady and gentleman, both exquisitely beautiful in person, whatever they might be in heart. With her two fair hands clasped together, she hung upon his arm, gazing up through her mask at his face, while he looked down at her with admiration

of a kind to which it would be almost profane to give the name of love.

"Nay," she said, in a laughing tone, "I did not send it. You do not suppose that I need to court any man."

"Nay, sweetest lady," replied Rochester, "I do not suppose you do; but I thought that fortune and yourself might have so favoured me, to let me know the right track to follow."

"Not I," answered the Countess; "and in good truth, if I had the other night thought, when you first talked of love, that you but did so because you thought it would please me, I would have been as cruel as a step-dame, to cure you of such vanity. If I knew the writer of the letter, too, methinks I would have punished him for a scandal."

"Not so," answered Rochester, labouring to frame some graceful speech, at which he was not dexterous. "You surely would not punish him for giving me the first hope of happiness, which I scarcely ventured to dream of."

"In truth I would," replied the lady; "how dare he stand sponsor for my affections, and promise and vow so many things in my name? I declare there is not a word of truth in it, whatsoever you may think. I love you not at all, and never shall. 'Tis but your vanity that makes you believe so."

"Nay, I call all these trees to witness," cried Rochester, "of what you acknowledged half an hour ago."

"Oh, women will say what they do not mean," replied the Countess. "I hope no one but the trees did hear me; for I would not have too many witnesses to such a falsehood.—And so you showed the letter to Sir Thomas Overbury, and he it was, I suppose, who said I had written it?"

"No," replied Rochester, "he divined that you were the person spoken of; but he said that it was a man's hand."

"I wish it were burnt off!" cried the Countess, in a tone of affected anger. "I don't like this Sir Thomas Overbury."

"And why not?" asked Carr. "He says that you are by far the most beautiful woman in the court, perhaps in the world."

"In that he is wise," answered the Countess, with a laugh; "but I hate him because you love him. I shall hate all that you love now."

"That is kind," said Carr; "I thought the proverb ran, 'Love me, love my dog.'"

"Ay," said the Countess, still in the same jesting tone; "if you will treat him as a dog. But I can tell you, henceforth and for ever, I will have you love nobody but me, or

I will have nought to do with your love. I will have you all mine; you shall not give one grain of your affection to aught else on earth, whether the breath of life be warm in it, or it be but the cold production of art or nature; I will not have thee stand and gaze at a picture of Rubens, or of Titian; thou shalt not stand upon Richmond Hill, and sigh over the fair prospect before thee; thou shalt not listen to a bird singing in a spray, and praise its melody. Thine eyes, thine ears, thy heart, shall be all mine, or I will be jealous. There can be no partnership in love."

"You must not bring a bill into Parliament for all this," replied Carr, "or it will be called monopoly, and we shall have a petition and remonstrance."

"No," cried the Countess; "these are but my rights over mine own—these are the royalties of my estate; every rich metal beneath the surface is mine, as well as the soil above; and no one shall trespass on my right."

In such conversation they walked on, idle enough, it is true, and vicious enough, considering the situation of the parties; but yet it seemed necessary to display before the reader's eyes this scene, which may save us further details into which we would fain not enter; and doubtless it has suggested, as we desired, a question to the mind—almost a charge against our veracity. "Can this be the Countess of Essex?" the reader may well ask;—"the same harsh, repulsive, fiery, passionate being, who has been already exhibited in scenes with her father and her husband, which make the pure and honest heart glow with indignation and contempt?—this soft, playful, jesting creature, the same bold impetuous being whom we have seen casting from her the most sacred obligations?"

Yes, reader, it is the same, only under another aspect; the same spoiled child—all remorseless fire when contradicted, now sporting, in her unwise hours of gratification, with the same carelessness of right which distinguished her in her darker moments. Have you not seen a tiger in its cage, unmoved by hunger or by rage, gambolling like a kitten, smoothing its glossy fur, and stretching out, in graceful sport, its limbs, both beautiful and strong? Who would suppose that it is the same fierce, devouring beast that rends the unhappy traveller in its fury, and gorges itself in blood and carnage?—Unrestrained passion is still the tiger—sportful when gratified, but terrible when thwarted.

They had turned back towards the palace from which they had wandered forth, Rochester thinking that, during his long absence, the King might have required his presence,

and the Countess knowing well that her ultimate objects could not be attained, unless her lover cultivated assiduously the favour of the Monarch. She could not refrain from saying, however, "Why do you not tell your dog,"—for so she henceforth called Overbury,—“to go and fawn in your place?”

Though there was something sarcastic in her tone, Rochester was not offended, for he was now completely the slave of her charms. Weak and unprincipled himself, the same personal beauty which at first raised him to distinction, was all that he thought valuable in others. The heart, the mind, virtue, even talent,—so often esteemed where goodness is neglected,—he cared little for, he thought little of, indeed; and in Frances Howard he certainly had found all that he sought for most in woman,—resplendent beauty, eager passions, and deep and vehement attachment to himself. That loveliness and that love had, for the first time, kindled within him the eager fire of which his own nature was susceptible. It seemed as if the insane passion with which she was possessed were in its nature infectious, and had seized upon him also. For her he was ready to dare anything,—to sacrifice anything, however sacred or however good; and it but wanted occasion to call forth all the power of the evil spirit, which had slumbered for want of object.

They had reached an alley leading back towards the palace, when suddenly they perceived the figure of a man advancing towards them, with his head bent down, and his arms folded upon his chest. He was tall, stately, and commanding in air, but seemed absorbed in a deep reverie; and Rochester paused, looking forward and saying, "Who can that be?"

"Do you not know?" asked the Countess, in a stern tone.

"No," he replied; "do you?"

"Right well," she answered; "it is that very noble gentleman, the Earl of Essex——"

Rochester's left hand fell upon the hilt of his sword; but the Countess proceeded,—“Do you think that, at any distance, I should not know that form, the hateful shadow of which has haunted me, waking and sleeping, for so long a time?”

"Shall we avoid him?" said Rochester, who, though as ready as any one to draw the sword, was not, to do him but justice, inclined to wrangle in the presence of a woman.

"No," answered the Countess, calmly, "I have no wish to shun him. Methinks I will take off my mask."

"No, no!" cried Rochester, "not so,—give him the opportunity of not seeming to know thee, if he will;" and, with a deliberate step, they proceeded along the alley, up which the Earl of Essex advanced in the same thoughtful mood.

When he was within a few steps of them he raised his head. His brow contracted, but that was the only sign of emotion he displayed. With a firm, steady look, he gazed at Rochester from head to foot, and then turned his eyes upon the Countess, fixing them upon her masked face sternly and sadly. It was evident that he knew her; and, indeed, the beauty of her form, and the queenly grace of her step, were not to be mistaken.

Not the slightest quivering of her hand, nor any clinging to the arm of Rochester, indicated agitation or alarm on her part. She trod, as she passed the man whose happiness she had wrecked, with a foot as bold and unwavering as if her path were one of virtue and honour. It seemed as if she wished him to see and know, how completely she had cast off all sense of right and decency; and perhaps it was indeed so, for her object was to drive him to have their incomplete marriage annulled, and set her free to wed the man for whom she had disgraced herself.

"I shall cut that man's throat some day," said Rochester, after they had passed; "saw you the glance he gave me? That cannot be long borne."

"I beseech you do nothing of the kind," replied the Countess, the few better points in whose character require to be displayed as well as the darker ones. "'Tis not that I am afraid for you, Rochester; but you must not spill his blood. I hate, abhor, loathe him; but still I have brought upon him much misery, and I wish not to do more. Did he stand in my way, did he still persist in his claims upon me, I know not what I might not do to free myself from him. Anything, anything, I believe. But such is not the case; thank God, he hates me as much as I hate him, and therefore I would injure him no further. Were he even to lash me with his tongue, instead of trying to look me down with his eyes, I could forgive him. No; you must do nothing against him. But now we are coming near the palace, and I must leave you; you can follow in a few minutes. I shall be with the Queen all night."

From these last words, the reader will learn that the Countess still strove to conceal her conduct from the eyes of the court in general; but in this, as might be expected, she was unsuccessful. Fond of scandal and of gossip, King James showed no reprobation of the gross immora-

lity and vice that reigned in his court, and seemed, indeed, to tolerate it, for the sake of the amusement which it afforded him to hear of all the intrigues that were going on around him. But the encouragement he gave to every one of his confidential attendants, to pry into and report to him all the secrets of the ladies and gentlemen attached to the Queen and to himself, ensured that nothing should be concealed which the cunning and acuteness of low-minded and unscrupulous men could discover.

When Rochester entered the palace and passed through the ante-chamber, where some five or six gentlemen were sitting, he found them all laughing at something which one of their companions, who was kneeling on the window seat and gazing out, reported to them from time to time."

"You seem gay, gentlemen," he said, walking onward, unconscious, perhaps, that he himself might have been the subject of their merriment.

"Yes, my Lord," replied one of the jokers, "we are just laughing at Bradshaw's observations from the window. You would think he was the alderman's wife, who has a corner-house in the market place of a country town, so cleverly does he settle the affairs of every one he sees go in and out of the palace."

The King's favourite did not venture to ask any more questions; but, replying, "I give him joy, both of his fine employment and your pleasant comparison," he walked on, and passed through the opposite door.

In a small cabinet to the right of the chamber beyond, he found Sir Thomas Overbury, who looked not particularly well satisfied; and Rochester felt an inclination to avoid any long discussion with him.

"Has the King asked for me?" he inquired.

"Oh, no," replied Overbury; "he has been well enough entertained during your absence."

"What with?" demanded Rochester.

"Gossip," answered Overbury, "gossip, as usual."

"Well, then," rejoined Rochester, "I will go and knock at the old lady's door."

"No, no," cried the knight, "Lord Northampton is with him now, having driven away Maxwell, who has been entertaining him with this affair between you and Lady Essex. I wish to Heaven, my Lord ——"

"Hush," cried Rochester, laughing, and taking him by the collar, "not a word, or I will strangle you. She is the most charming creature in the whole world; beauty, wit, grace, everything—I can no more give her up than I can fly."

"I do not ask you to give her up, my Lord," replied Sir Thomas Overbury, whose morality was not very nice. "I only wish you to be more careful. For a light love affair like this, you will never think of marring your whole fortunes; and if you do not mend the rashness of your passion, you will do so. Surely there was no need boldly to walk out with her in the chase, when you have so many other opportunities of being together."

"Oh, she longed for a walk with me, she said," replied Rochester, "and how could I refuse her? Besides, nobody could see us. You knew where I was gone; but we went out and came back separate, so that none of the rest of the court could——"

"Could do anything," interrupted Overbury, "but sit in the ante-room, and make epigrams upon you by the hour. The last thing I heard Bradshaw say was foolish enough; but it will show you the talk:

'We soon shall see the Dane driven home,
And Saxon knights in Wessex.
Essex to Middlesex is come,
And Rochester joins Essex.'

"His bad lines," replied Rochester, angrily, "shall cost him his place, or his ears."

"Ah, that's the way," cried Overbury, "that one rash act brings on another. You must needs parade yourself in public with this lady, and then you make an enemy of a man who has many powerful friends. But hark!—There goes Lord Northampton from the King's closet. You had better go now, and laugh off this affair."

"I will, I will," replied Rochester, and gladly left Sir Thomas Overbury, whose friendly counsels, to say the truth, were no longer so palatable to him as once they had been.

Those who direct us with skill towards the gratification of our passions or our wishes are loved for their complaisance, and admired for their ability, by the weak and unprincipled, by the ordinary and the selfish—and, too often, by the wise and the great; for that twofold exertion of reason is extraordinary indeed, which, when misled by inclination, enables us to appreciate the wisdom which sees that we are wrong, and to be grateful for the love that would guide us back to right.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was a bright and beautiful day upon the whole; though, from time to time, over the deep blue sky, and through the sunshiny air, came some large pelting drops of rain, though nothing worthy of the name of a cloud was seen, and the shower lasted but a minute, fleeting away with a rainbow on its wings, like some gay child tossing up a many-coloured scarf into the wind. There was a bright party, too, upon the banks of the Thames, in Buckinghamshire, fit for the pencil of a Landseer. It consisted of a fine tall man, of noble presence, about fifty years of age, mounted on a stout black horse, with a broad hat and feathers on his head, and dressed in dark green, with a pair of tan-coloured boots and red tops. Over his shoulder he wore a pouch of velvet, slung by a broad band of leather, embroidered with gold, and reaching to the hilt of his short sword. His hands were covered with large gloves of buckskin, the flaps of which extended nearly to his elbow; and over the first finger of the left were thrown some silken strings and little globular bells. He had, too, a whistle of silver, suspended round his neck by a green cord, with a tassel; and, as he sat there, with his grey moustache and flowing grey hair, his bright and merry brown eye, and easy seat upon his horse, one might judge him to be an experienced sportsman, well satisfied with the success of the day.

On his right hand was a lady—a few years younger than himself, perhaps, but not many—mounted upon a round, short-legged, but powerful galloway, not deficient in fire or breeding, but chosen apparently for its strength and courage. Its bright eye glanced, and its ear quivered, while, held in by the rein, it seemed eager to go on, and pawed the ground with its most delicate foot. The lady herself was dressed in a rich riding suit; and the hooded hawk, which she held upon one hand, and smoothed down from time to time with the other, sufficiently announced her occupation. The expression of her countenance was high and dignified; but, at the same time, there was a certain degree of quickness of temper in the glance of her eye, somewhat softened by a pleasant and good-humoured smile upon her lip.

On the other side of the gentleman we have mentioned appeared a younger lady, with her beautiful brown hair escaping in rich curls from a small black velvet cap, ornamented with a single black feather, and her face glowing

with exercise. She was mounted on a light grey jennet, full of blood and spirit, but apparently well trained and good tempered, who, with head down and extended neck, snuffled at a low-legged spaniel dog, which, with open mouth and drooping tongue, lay looking in the face of its master.

Near 'his group of falconers was seen a strong middle-aged man, kneeling down beside a dead heron, which lay upon the grassy bank, and fastening on a hood upon the head of a hawk, which he seemed to be caressing and scolding at the same time.

"Ah, the haggard!" he cried, "ah, the haggard! thou art not half reclaimed, art thou? My Lord, she will be a magnificent bird next spring. Did you see that point she made at the pitch? and such a stoop!—There is not a bird in the mew could do better. I told you, sir, with her first feather.—Come, lady, come, no rustling.—Where's the other glove, boy?" he continued, addressing a young man, who, with two others, habited as falconers, stood near, with long poles in their hands. "There's another bird not far off, my Lord."

"Ay, but here comes a boat," answered his master, "and they will put him up.—I thought so; there he goes—there he goes!—Slip Margery, my love!—Whoop! Sir Long Legs, whoop!—Off with her, off with her. Calm, good Margery, calm! She has him, now she has him." And off flew the falcon from the lady's hand; while the heron, apparently unwilling to tower, flapped its heavy wings along over the water, rippling it for some way with its feet.

"After her, after her!" cried the gentleman; "the brute will show us no sport. As I live she will let Margery strike her in the water. No, no, there she goes up!—After her, after her;" and away he galloped, accompanied by the lady on the galloway, and the three lads with their poles.

The younger lady paused, however, and reined in her jennet, notwithstanding all its struggles to follow the rest. Her eyes were fixed upon the boat, which, rowed by two stout men with the full current of the stream, now rapidly approached the spot where she was. The next minute she slipped from the saddle, her eyes bright, and her whole face glowing; and with the bridle over her left arm, approached the very brink of the water, holding out her hand, which in another instant was clasped in that of William Seymour.

He sprang at once on shore; and, while Arabella strove

to conceal from the eyes of the boatmen the joy that was in her heart, there was quite enough in her countenance to sweep away all jealousy for ever from the heart of her lover, if ever he entertained it.

"Is this accident or design?" asked Arabella, in a low tone.—"It is very pleasant, Seymour, whatever it is.—But where have you been since?"

"Three days I was kept at Hampton Court," answered Seymour; "then took my departure for Cambridge, cut across thence to Oxford, and then, knowing well that I should have a welcome from the Countess, came down the river with my two men in the boat.—Run her into the first creek you can find," he continued, turning to the boatmen, "and come up to Lord Shrewsbury's house at Malvoisie. Where can these men find a creek, falconer, in which the boat will be in safety?"

"Not a quarter of a mile down, sir," replied a man, who was settling the falcon, which had previously struck a heron, upon a perch formed of four rollers of wood, in the shape of a square, which hung from the neck of a boy, placed in the centre thereof, much like the pails of a London milkwoman:—"they will find a creek, and a boat-house belonging to my Lord, too. There will be room enough for your boat beside the Earl's barge. Then, if they follow the path, it will take them to the house.—But I must run after the hawk, my Lady; 'twere a shame if she struck the quarry, and I not there.—There they go over Lawson's lea."

"Go, go, Harry," cried Arabella; "and tell my uncle I am following."

The man and the boy hurried away; and after pausing to speak a word or two more, Seymour replaced Arabella in her saddle; and then, with his hand resting on the croup, walked slowly on beside her, gazing up into her face, and drinking in sweet draughts of pure, and high, and holy affection. It was a beautiful contrast to the dark scene of strong but evil passion, which it has been lately our unpleasing task to paint.

"I am sure they will receive you kindly," said Arabella, after a short pause, in answer to something Seymour had said; "but I doubt, William, indeed I doubt, that either will approve of your staying long."

"Doubt not—doubt nothing, dearest Arabella," replied Seymour. "I saw the Countess in London before I went down to Hampton Court. She taxed me with my love; and I did not deny it; and she owned that such constancy, on your part and on mine, deserved its reward. I have had

a letter from her, too, since she heard of that scene before the council, which she pronounces scandalous and wicked, and says it is high time you should be freed from the thralldom in which you are kept, and your heart suffered to have its liberty. 'Tis by her invitation, indeed, that I came."

"But my uncle," said Arabella, "I fear my uncle; I do not think he will countenance——"

She paused, and William Seymour asked, "What, my beloved?"

"What I believe you wish," replied Arabella, with her cheek glowing, "our marriage in secret."

"My wishes go further still, dear one," replied William Seymour; "I could not be content—not half content, to see my Arabella only by stealth, with long and frequent intervals. I must be able to pass the whole livelong day with her, to sun myself in her smiles whenever I will, to hear the music of her voice continually, to watch her eyes, and trace every varying thought from day to day."

"Oh, that can never be here," answered Arabella, sadly.

"No, not here," replied William Seymour, "but in another land, where this King's power will not reach us. In any of the Spanish territories, in Flanders, in Italy, in Spain itself, we shall be quite secure; and where thou art, is my country, Arabella. That climate will be brightest where thy looks beam upon me—that scene the fairest where thou art by my side."

A bright drop rose in Arabella's eye as he spoke, but she answered, almost sadly, "You know, William, that I desire nothing but you; and yet it seems to me hardly right that my love should banish you from the land of your birth. You have many friends, good men and noble, wise and honourable; and I should be proud to see the husband that I love surrounded and admired by those he himself esteems. I would enlarge all your sphere of enjoyment, Seymour, not diminish it. I would not have you for me, if I could help it, give up one friend—abandon one virtuous pleasure. Oh no, love is not a selfish passion. On the contrary, it is a self-denying one; for I feel that all I could desire to make me happy, would be the happiness of him I love."

"Dear, noble girl," cried Seymour, bending down his head, and kissing the hand that rested on her bridle rein, "I say so too; and therefore is it that I give not one thought to the abandonment of everything else, for the bright hope of making you happy in some distant country. But still, my beloved, you need not think that we shall be

condemned to everlasting banishment. A few short years may pass, till the King sees that he cannot break our union; and then he must perceive, that it is for his own interest, as well as his honour, that we should return, and enjoy our rights in our own land."

"I do not know," answered Arabella, in a doubtful tone; "he is hard and resolute in his resentments. Do not you know how he treated the Palatine who urged him, with continual prayers and entreaties, to set free the unfortunate Lord Grey? All that the King replied was, 'When I come to your dominions, son-in-law, I will ask for none of your prisoners.'"

"Well, then, we will set him at defiance," replied Seymour; "we will fix our happiness in our mutual love; we will form our high fortunes in contentment, and leave him to rule, with his sceptre of parchment, those whose fate hangs upon his smile. I would rather be the husband of Arabella Stuart, in any land in all the world, where I may boldly hold her to my heart, and call her mine, however poor be the pittance that I have to share with her, than live in riches in my native country, with the dread of an unjust monarch's frown darkening each moment that I spent in her sweet company. But there stands my Lord of Shrewsbury; his bird has brought the heron down, I see; so he will be in good humour, and we must take the brightest moment we can find."

Thus saying, he advanced with Arabella to a little knoll, on which the group of falconers had re-assembled. The Earl had by this time dismounted from his horse, and was standing beside his wife, who was bending her head, as if talking to him rapidly, but in an under tone; and the bright yellow sky behind them showed clearly the fine commanding features of the Countess of Shrewsbury, full of animation and eagerness. The Earl shrugged his shoulders, with a laugh; and then, advancing cordially towards William Seymour, he held out his hand, saying,

"Welcome, welcome, thou man of wanderings! You have missed a rare day's sport by not coming three hours sooner, and well nigh spoiled our sport, too, by stirring this greycoated gentleman from the reeds with your boat. However, as Margery has avenged herself, and brought him down from the skies with a fall—as should be the case with all ambitious spirits when they soar too high—we will forgive you. Come, we will back towards the house."

"I did not see what you were about, till it was too late, my Lord," replied William Seymour, grasping his hand. "Dear lady, how goes it with you?" he continued, ad-

vancing to the Countess ; and adding, in a low tone, as he bent down to kiss her glove, "thanks for your comfortable letter."

"You shall have more to thank me for than that," replied Lady Shrewsbury. "Well, my pretty cousin," she continued, turning to Arabella, with a smile, "we have struck our bird to-day, methinks."

"Not I," answered Arabella, innocently. "I had no hawk to fly, and therefore have got no quarry."

"Ay, but you have," answered the Countess ; "and the goodliest, it seems. Come, Shrewsbury, deliver me of these jesses. I will have no more birds upon my hand to-day."

"Take care, lady mine," replied the Earl, approaching, "that you do not get more upon your hands than you can manage."

The Countess took him by the mustachio, saying, "Wilt thou be silent?"

"See how she treats me!" cried the Earl, laughing ; "and I have borne this for twenty long years. Let no man say, that there is not meekness amongst husbands ! Come, I will walk back. Bring my horse, boy. You are too fat to walk, good wife, and this poor thing is too delicate, so we men will trudge a-foot, while the women keep the saddle. 'Twas not so in the Queen's time, Seymour. With a woman on the throne, men ruled ; now the coif and the petticoat govern all."

The Countess and Arabella rode on, and Seymour and the Earl followed on foot, leaving the hawks to the care of the falconers. Lord Shrewsbury was gay and good-humoured, perfectly cordial in his manner towards his young friend, and repeated, more than once, that he was most happy to see him ; but he touched not at all upon the subject nearest to Seymour's thoughts, although the words he had let fall in speaking to the Countess, induced his companion to believe that he was not unaware of his love for Arabella.

The house of Malvoisie, which has long since disappeared from the face of the earth, had been built in the last year of the reign of Henry VIII., and, consequently, might be considered in those days a modern erection. But our somewhat weeping climate soon stamps the mark of age upon man's works ; and, in the space of sixty years, the red brick had become brown, and lichens had gathered here and there upon the walls. The immense quantity of beech trees, from which Buckinghamshire takes its name, and which there came close up to the house on three sides, might have contributed to this effect ; but, however that might

be, the house had already a very venerable appearance; and the four terraces, one below the other, with their low walls and ornamented coping, gave it likewise a magnificent air, although it was not of very great extent.

Servants were waiting at the door to give admission to the lord of the mansion and his guest; and the Earl conducted his young friend at once into the Countess's drawing-room, which was furnished in a manner that any one may see described, if they choose to look into Lady Compton's letter to her husband after his recovery.

Lady Shrewsbury and Arabella, still in their riding dress, were standing talking together eagerly; and Arabella's face was glowing, while her eyes were cast down, so that Seymour easily conceived what had been the nature of their conversation.

"Now, then, close the door, Shrewsbury," said the Countess, "and let us hold a council together."

"Nonsense," replied the Earl; "suffer the poor youth to recover and refresh himself a little, before you attack him. Besides, I tell you fairly, I will have nothing to do with your plots and conspiracies, even if their object be but the robbery of a wren's nest. You may do what you like, lady mine. I never was powerful in my life in marital rule; and my sway has waxed slenderer every year."

"Because you knew very well," answered the Countess, laughing, "that you had got somebody who could manage her own affairs, and yours, too, better than you could yourself; so, like a wise man as you are, you proved yourself a most obedient husband."

"Well, well," said the Earl, good-humouredly, "I will have nothing to do with your councils; but I do insist that it is better to let this poor youth eat his supper, and not hear his fate fasting. So come along to your chamber, Seymour, and wash your hands. When once my good housewife gets hold of you, you may give yourself up; you will have no power over your own actions afterwards, that I can tell you."

"After supper be it, then," answered the Countess. "Come, Bella, we may as well put off these weeds, too;" and thus saying, she led the way from the room.

The Earl accompanied his young guest to his chamber, where he found all the goods and chattels which his men had brought up from the boat; and Lord Shrewsbury, closing the door, took his young friend's hand kindly, saying, in a graver tone than he had hitherto used, "William, I wish you well, believe me, and no man would do more to serve you, or to see you happy. But let me advise

you to think well what you are about. A man, it is true, may well risk much for the sweetest lady in all the land ; but let not passion blind you, and induce you to take any step of great importance without due consideration. Recollect that this dear girl's fate is implicated as well as your own. Having said this, my boy, I shall add no more ; but, whatever you do, be sure that I will stand by you when it is done, as the son of my old dear friend, and the grandson of one of the noblest gentlemen in Europe. Now, farewell for the present.

William Seymour sat down and meditated. What the Earl of Shrewsbury had said, had the effect which words of good, plain, common sense, mingled with frank and feeling kindness, is almost sure to have, on the hearts of all but the vicious and the hardened. It made him think deeply—intensely, of that which he was about to do. It did more—it made him even doubt his own motives, and his own judgment ; it made him try, by every test that the powers of a strong mind could bring to bear upon the subject, the course he was about to pursue, and to ask himself, for Arabella's sake, whether his eyes were not blinded by passion ; whether he was really seeking that which was most likely to conduce to her happiness ; or whether he was risking her peace for his own gratification.

Eagerly did he debate the question with himself ; and he strove resolutely to act as an impartial judge between desire and self-denial ; but love is the most eloquent of advocates ; and it is not to be wondered at, that, with so good a cause as that which he had to plead, he overpowered all the arguments on the opposite side. To a mind not very sensible to fear, or alive to danger, the risks and inconveniences seemed small—the probabilities of success great ; and happiness, if their escape could be effected, certain. He recollected all that Arabella herself had said ; the frank confession of her love, the deep devotion which she showed towards him, her readiness to abandon everything for him. He asked himself, if his whole happiness for life was staked upon his union with her, could he doubt that hers was equally dependent upon it also. And then he went on to think of what would be her fate, if, neglecting the opportunity—if, abandoning the chance of uniting themselves together for ever, she were left still in the same situation at the court of England, in which she had lived for the last two or three years. The argument which that question called forth was conclusive. Could he, for any consideration, leave her to wither under the cold and icy tyranny of a monarch like James I.,—the

sport of all his caprices, the victim of whatever a harsh policy, or a weak complacency with the views of his vicious favourites, might require? He pictured her, day after day, suffering from unjust severity, or chilling neglect; he thought of her, forced to mingle in scenes of vicious excess with those whom her pure heart contemned and abhorred; he saw her urged, commanded, forced to give her hand to some base minion of an unprincipled king; living a short life of misery and gloom; and dying with blighted hope and disappointed love. Could he suffer this? Ought he to suffer it? For her sake, as well as his own, if there were but a bare chance of delivering her, could he stand coldly by, and abandon her to such a fate as this?

Love, as may well be supposed, easily won the day, and proved to his conviction, that the only hope of happiness for himself, and her he loved, was in speedy flight; and, after a few moments given to the arrangement of his dress, he again sought Arabella and the Countess, determined to persevere.

He found them both with the Earl; and, by common consent, nothing was said upon the subject, which occupied all thoughts, for about an hour and a half, over which space of time we will pass, as the conversation of persons, whose minds are filled with one engrossing theme, upon every-day topics in which they feel no interest, would be as tedious to the reader as to themselves.

The supper was over; the windows were closed; the lights were lighted; and the party had once more assembled in the Countess's drawing-room. The Earl, however, stood beside one of the tables, and, taking up a light, he said, "I am going to the book room. When this plot is hatched, you can come and tell me, sweetheart; and then you shall play me an air on the virginals, or sing me a song to the lute."

"Dear uncle," said Arabella, laying her hand upon his arm, and looking up in his face, as if she wished him to stay. But Lord Shrewsbury merely bent down his head and kissed her cheek, saying, "God protect thee, in all circumstances, my dear girl!" and, without waiting for further reply, quitted the room.

Arabella leaned her arm upon the table, and placed her hand over her eyes, while the Countess demanded, as soon as the door was closed, "Well, Seymour, what are your plans? It is high time that all this should come to some conclusion; or you two, unable to restrain your love from appearing, and not having taken care to shelter it against storms, will get into misery, from which we shall not be able to rescue you."

"I think so too, dear lady," replied Seymour; "and I have come hither, certain of your kind support and assistance to arrange what is to be done."

"You are both agreed, I suppose?" said the Countess; "you love each other dearly, I know.—Is it not so, Bella?"

Arabella looked up with a smile, but made no answer, and the Countess proceeded.

"That will do," she said; "and I do not see why your affection should be barred by the swine King we have now upon the throne. Seymour, you have got some plan in your head, I am sure. Let us hear what it is."

"That this dear girl should fly with me," replied her lover; "that is the plain truth, Countess. I care not much to what country we go, provided it be one that will keep us free, for a time, from the persecution of the King, so long as his anger lasts."

"I thought so," said Lady Shrewsbury; "and I suppose that must be the event. But I cannot consent, Seymour, to let her go without being first your wife."

"But how can that be accomplished, dear lady?" asked William Seymour. "You know, if we were to apply to any of the bishops, they would carry the tidings forthwith to the King; and if we have the banns published, the fact will be soon all over the court. We can be married the moment we are across the Channel."

"No, no," answered the Countess, in her usual decided tone; "she goes with you as your wife, or not at all. Do not suppose I think you would wrong her, Seymour; for I am sure you would lose your own life first; but if diamonds are valuable because they are rare—I am sure, so in these days is a good name; and she must not lose hers—no, not for love itself. Nor is the matter difficult, as I shall manage it. We have got a parson here who, though he looks upon us all as what he calls Papists, is my very humble and good servant; and would be a Catholic too, if it was not for fear of losing his living, God wot. Thanks be to heaven, he mumbles like an old woman chewing a crust; and I never yet could discover the person who, when he publishes what he calls the *banns* of matrimony, could find out who were the people he was going to tie in them. Thus, then, I will have it. You shall stay here three nights, and speed away again on the third morning. You shall show yourself at the court, and in other places; and after the third Sunday you shall come down hither, where, in this quiet little church, perched up amongst the woods, without a house but the parson's for a mile round,

you may take each other for better for worse, without any one knowing aught about it. In the meantime, Seymour, you make all your preparations for departure. Have your ship ready, and your money prepared. My Lord of Hertford will not love you the less for marrying secretly a lady of the Blood Royal; and he is never unwilling to open his purse, for any generous purpose. Shrewsbury and I will give you some help, such as it is, though the times are hard ones; and as, doubtless, the little that our poor Arabella has will be lost for love of you, it must be made up by your love for her. Let there be no writing, in the meantime, till you come again; for we know well enough there are spies abroad."

Seymour kissed the Countess's hand, with many thanks, acknowledging that her plan was the wisest and the best. "But, dear lady," he added, "I almost fear that, if this takes place in your house, it may draw upon you and my good Lord of Shrewsbury the indignation of the King."

"Good faith," answered the Countess, "his Majesty had better not meddle with me. 'Tis such poor timid things as this that he can intimidate and overawe. But, even if he should try, I have a hold upon him which will keep him silent, at least I think so. 'Tis not many months ago that he said to me, when the marriage proposed with the Duke of Gueldres was refused, that Arabella might choose one of his own subjects if she liked; he consented to it freely."

Arabella started up, and gazed upon her aunt with doubt and surprise. "Oh, why did you not tell me!" she exclaimed.

"Because I did not think fit, poor bird," replied the Countess; "and something more.—I assured the King that you had no thought of marriage then—that you were indisposed to give your hand to any but a man of princely birth.—I knew right well," she added, abruptly, "that he was wishing to tie you to his minion, Carr, and I was resolved to shield you from such degradation. In wedding this youth here, you wed one of princely birth; for in his veins is flowing the blood of our Seventh Harry; and though you, sweet maid, may be nearest akin to this present King, I am not sure that he is not nearest to the throne of England. But so it is, Bella, the King did give this consent; and I see not why we may not use it now as well as then."

"Oh, this is indeed joyful!" exclaimed Arabella; "he cannot—he dare not treat us ill after this."

"Trust him not, trust him not," replied the Countess; "his word is as unstable as a quicksand; and, if you think to rest upon it, you will be swallowed up alive. The course I have laid before you is the only one you can pursue; though this consent that he has given may perhaps shame him into moderation, and enable you to return sooner to your native land. Now I shall leave you together, pretty birds, in your cage, to talk over your plans; and then you shall sing your uncle a song, if you have any voice left. While you are here, Seymour, we must keep you somewhat close. Our woods, and parks, and fields, may give you space enough; but you must avoid the towns and villages, lest our secret be carried to the court."

CHAPTER XXV.

ONE half the world does not know how the other half live; is an old English proverb, and a true one; but there is something more to be said upon the subject than even that,—not one-millionth part of the world know what the rest are doing. Happy were it for them if they did; for how many a base and criminal design would be frustrated; how many an anxious and careful thought would be avoided; how many a wise and prudent scheme would find success; how many a good man, struggling with poverty, would meet relief and honour; how many a great man, crushed under the cold obstruction of circumstances, would be taken by the hand, and led up to the high places of the world, if the actions of all were open to the eyes of all!

The days passed sweetly with Arabella Stuart and William Seymour, for the time during which the Countess of Shrewsbury permitted him to stay. They laid out their plans; they made their arrangements; they talked over the future; and imagination, that pleasant painter, represented the coming days in all the glittering colours of hope and light. Even when he had left Malvoisie, and was deprived of the society of her he loved, still the sweet recollection and the bright expectation gladdened the present, and cheered him while he made all the preparations which were necessary for the execution of his scheme. But, in the meantime, the views and designs of others, with little if any reference to himself, were proceeding on a course calculated to frustrate all his hopes for a time, if not for ever; and while he, in total ignorance that such things were taking place, was rejoicing at the near approach of

happiness, a hand was stretched out to snatch it from him, just as the cup was being raised to his lip. Oh! could he but have seen the events that were occurring at the court of England; could he have heard the words that were spoken, and divined the plans that were formed, he might have found matter for anxiety and apprehension, it is true, but love would certainly have found some stratagem to frustrate those purposes, which now marched calmly on to their accomplishment.

We have said that the designs and views of which we have spoken had little direct reference to Seymour, and to the schemes for his escape with Arabella. The eyes of the King and his courtiers had been completely blinded by the precautions he had taken; his visit to Malvoisie had not been even whispered amongst the scandal-mongers of the court; and although the preparations which he had been making after his return to London were not altogether unnoticed, the tongue of calumny had assigned to them a very different motive from the real one, and most unintentionally favoured his purposes, by screening the truth under a falsehood. The suspicion which had been so strongly entertained of the attachment existing between Arabella and himself had almost altogether died away; and rumour had falsely attributed to him some tender connection in the native land of intrigue—Italy, which was supposed to be once more leading him away from the shores of his own country.

In the meantime, the King's favourite, Rochester, was pursuing, with all the vehemence of strong and overpowering passion, the guilty course which he had entered upon with the beautiful fiend who had got him in her toils. His criminal intimacy with Lady Essex was no longer whispered with a smile, or pointed at in an epigram. It was the open talk of the whole court, the subject of grave and painful reprehension to the few good and wise who were admitted to the royal circle, and of laughter and merriment to the gay, the unthinking, and vicious multitude which thronged the palaces of James I.

To one of those, however, who could not be classed amongst the most strict in their notions of morality, his open and daring violation of even common decency was a subject of bitter and anxious thought. Sir Thomas Overbury could not shut out the conviction, that this disgraceful connection might prove a serious obstacle in the way of his favourite project, of allying his patron to the Blood Royal of England by a marriage with Arabella Stuart; and every jest he heard upon the subject came painfully to his ear.

Sometimes he thanked heaven that Arabella was absent, and hoped that Rochester's passion would be as short-lived as it was fierce; but when he saw that, on the contrary, it became every day more and more ardent and outrageous, he asked himself if it might not be better to hurry on the marriage with Arabella without any further delay; and by engaging the King to exercise his full authority, to carry it through as rapidly as possible, in order to bind her for ever to Rochester, before she had such good cause to allege for refusing him her hand.

Doubts and perplexities, indeed, surrounded him; for although Carr still talked to him on the subject of his marriage, and, in order to blind his friends to the designs which he knew Overbury would oppose, affected to look upon his union with Arabella, whether he loved her or not, as a thing absolutely necessary to his security and advancement, yet he showed himself occasionally cold and captious, reserved and insincere, towards one who, for a long period, had possessed his fullest confidence, and guided him at will.

Many a deep and anxious fit of thought did all these considerations cause Sir Thomas Overbury; and he resolved, after a long deliberation, to try whether, by art, he could not establish a new hold upon the favourite, more firm and tenacious than that of mere gratitude.

"I must have some power over him," he said; "I must have something in my hands to give, in order that I may demand that in return which might be otherwise denied, notwithstanding all the services I have rendered him."

Such were his thoughts and feelings at the period when the court removed from Hampton; and we shall now proceed to show the manner in which he endeavoured to effect his object, premising that for some months he had been labouring to bring the King's mind to the particular tone he wanted.

It was in the King's closet at the palace of Greenwich. The Monarch was dressed in hunting costume; and, as the season was rapidly approaching when he could no longer venture to hunt the hart, he was somewhat eager and impatient to set out upon his sport.

Something, however, had gone wrong in the stables; his horse had not been brought to the door at which he was to mount; and he had sent one after another, first a page, then a gentleman of the Privy Chamber, and then Lord Rochester himself, to see what had become of the grooms and huntsmen, upon whose heads he bestowed a torrent of condemnation, in very profane and unkingly language.

To ordinary observers it would have appeared that a more unpropitious moment could not have been selected for pressing a suit or asking a favour; but Sir Thomas Overbury knew King James as well as any one who was about him, and was aware that requests, which he would have denied flatly and resolutely when he had time for consideration, might often be wrung from him by importunity, in a moment of impatience and haste. The moment, then, that he saw Lord Rochester pass through the ante-chamber, he hurried to the King,—whom he knew to be now alone,—with a small slip of paper in hand half covered with writing.

"Well, sir, well, where are the horses?" cried James, as soon as he saw him. "Those heathen fellows will let the fresh of the morning go by; and the sun's peeping out as hot as a kitchen fire, to drink up all the dew off the grass."

"I think they mistook the hour your Majesty named," replied Overbury, "and, instead of a quarter before, made ready for a quarter after nine."

"Body o' sin! did you ever hear the like of that!" cried James; "did they never go out to track a stag in the early morning? What have you got there? But if that's a supplication, man, you may as well spare your pains.—I'll have nothing to do with it.—Take it away."

"It is not a supplication, may it please your Majesty," replied Overbury, "but a paper which your Majesty was pleased to say you would sign. You may remember the matter in which I moved you, sire, regarding my Lord Rochester and my Lady Arabella."

"I'll not sign it, sir, I'll not sign it," cried the King, "I told you so before. She's got a hankering, sir, after that fellow Seymour, and I'll not sign it. If I was sure she would use it only to marry Carro, I don't say but that I might. But I will not have the other! "Now look ye, young gentleman," he added, falling, imperceptibly to himself, into a disquisitionary tone, "you are not without sense, and good parts, and judgment; and while we have a minute to spare, we will condescend to instruct you as to our motives; which with kings—who are bound to exercise their sagacity upon fine points, that altogether escape the attention of ordinary men—are very different from the common motives of the people, or even of councillors, and men accustomed to broad and general state affairs."

"I hear your Majesty with reverence and gratitude," replied Sir Thomas Overbury, in the fulsome style then used towards the Monarch, "and will lay to heart every word that falls from your lips, as the most precious guide to wisdom."

"Well, sir, that's right," rejoined James. "Now listen, then. Ordinary men will think—and, most like, you amongst them—that it is a strange thing that I should let this lady wed Rochester, and refuse her to the fellow Seymour. The vulgar people will think that it is because Rochester is, what they call, with their profane tongues, the King's favourite. I know their gabble right well. Others will think that it is because I judge ill of this lad Seymour, or well of Rochester, as the case may be; and in this they will be reverent, though not altogether wise. You yourself may think that you have had a finger in the pie, and brought the matter about by smooth words and representations; but these opinions are altogether wrong. As my Lord of Rochester is now a man of great estate, the match may be a suitable one. As his fortunes depend upon us, we shall always have the staff in our own hands: and it is not unexpedient that she should be married to some one over whom we have the greatest authority, to prevent her from wedding another who might cause confusion. But these are all collateral or subsidiary considerations, and go no further than to affect her marriage with Lord Rochester. But there are reasons why we will not have her marry the fellow Seymour, which are these:—that he, failing his elder brother, who is but a puny lad, is the immediate representative of that Lady Catherine Grey, descended from King Henry VII., by Mary, Queen Dowager of France; and the lady, as you well know, being of the Blood Royal of England, and next to the throne, after ourself and our children, has been the object, as you well know, of many dark conspiracies and treacherous designs, both amongst the subjects of our crown and foreign princes. Now were the two lines blended more by her marriage with this Seymour, there is no knowing what might come of it—wars, and rumours of wars, tumults, and confusion, sir.* If they two were to lay their heads together, and take up either with the Papists or the Puritans, they might blow up a flame in a minute that would be difficult to put out again."

"I see your Majesty's wisdom," replied Overbury, with a low bow, and a well-assorted face; "and it shows clearly that her marriage with Lord Rochester should be brought about as soon as possible. If you will sign this permission, sir, for her to marry any of your Majesty's subjects, it will doubtless greatly facilitate the affair."

"Well, then, put in his name," said the King; "why should he not be the person expressed?"

"Because your Majesty is well aware," answered Overbury, "the lady has always shown herself coy and cap-

tious, never willing to give her hand where she supposed it was wished. At all events, sir, the paper could only be used according to your Majesty's directions;—and as to Mr. Scymour," he continued, "he is now paying not the slightest attention to the lady, since your Majesty so severely reprimanded him."

"It was due and merciful severity," answered the King, "like that of——"

But we cannot venture to go on with the blasphemous parallel which he drew between himself and the Almighty. He ended, however, by asking, "Where is the lad now?"

"He is at the house of his father, the Lord Beauchamp, in London," replied Overbury. "He spent a week at Cambridge, sire, then came back direct, and has been in town ever since, preparing, they say, for another journey to Italy, where, it is rumoured, he has some love amongst the Italian ladies."

The King began to chuckle at what he called "the fule boy going a thousand miles for a woman;" and he laid his commands strongly on Overbury to find out all about it, and give him information.

The knight promised diligent compliance, and then added, "If your Majesty is gracious enough to sign this paper, it will give my Lord of Rochester the strongest possible claim to the lady's gratitude and regard; and it will not be necessary to present it to her, but merely to intimate that it exists; so that all danger of a misuse of it will be avoided."

"Foul fall thee, man!" exclaimed the King, hesitating, and taking him by the ear; "what a pertinacious hound thou art!"

"I know your Majesty is fond of a staunch dog," answered Overbury; "and you will never blame me for hunting upon the right track."

"Well, well," cried the King, "I'll not sign it, man.—That's to say, not just at present."

"Well then, sire," replied Overbury, determined to make one more effort, "I had better tell my Lord of Rochester at once, not to keep him any longer in suspense. I hear his foot upon the stairs."

"No, no," cried the King, hesitating; "let's see, let's see. Give me the paper."

Overbury gave him the paper, repeating, "I had better let him know your Majesty's resolution at once."

Rochester's step was now distinctly heard coming along the corridor, and James looked round with a sort of nervous glance, exclaiming,—

"Where's the pen? where's the pen?"

"There, your Majesty," answered Overbury, putting one into his hand.

James wrote his name rapidly at the bottom of the paper, and gave it to Overbury, saying, "There, there, let him have it. But do not stop him now; and hark ye, you need not say that we refused to do it."

"I shall tell him, sire," replied Overbury, "that nothing but your Majesty's great regard for him induced you to consent."

"Well, well, that will do—but do not stop him now," answered James, hastily; "and then exclaimed, as Rochester entered the closet, "The horses, man! the horses!"

"Are at the door, your Majesty," replied the favourite; "and the hounds and huntsmen gone to the north gate."

"Foul fall the loons," cried James; "I'll make them mind my words another time. Come away, Bobby, come away! We have lost much time already;" and thus saying, he shuffled out of the closet, followed by Rochester; while Overbury paused, gazing with a look of thoughtful satisfaction at the paper he held in his hand.

"Ay," now he cried, "the way to fortune is open before him, and the road to power open before me. And yet," he added, thoughtfully, "Rochester has become somewhat cold, even when I am serving him the most zealously. Such is the usual course of the world. I wonder how far he will push his ingratitude?"

Thus is it ever with men blindfolded by their own selfishness. Overbury fancied that he was entitled to deep gratitude from Rochester, because he schemed and laboured to serve him; but he forgot to ask himself, whether all that he did was not with a view to the gratification of his own ambition.

The man who, purely for the sake of another, sacrifices his own peace, his own repose, his own purposes, may well be entitled to thankfulness. Nay, he who at no sacrifice does a kindly act, may have merit likewise; but the man who, in labouring for another, has his own interests, immediate or remote, still before his eyes, can claim but little gratitude from him whom he may benefit in reaching his own subjects.

Had anything been wanting to show what were the principles upon which Sir Thomas Overbury acted, his next thoughts would have displayed them: "I will guard against ingratitude," he said; "I will keep this paper in my own hands. His fortune will be then in my power, and hers

too will be of my making.—It will be better to have her recalled to the court at once. There is no fear of this Seymour now. He thinks not of her. As far as I can hear from Maxwell, he has neither been to see her since she went, nor even deigned to write.—No, no; 'twas but a common visit of courtesy; and these tale-bearers have magnified it into a matter of importance.—It is not there I have my fear; but I doubt that daring, impassioned, unprincipled Countess of Essex. I must break through that folly, or Rochester is lost; and yet it must be done skilfully, for it is no light thing to bring down upon one's head the anger of a fierce and ruthless woman. Still it must be done; and though Rochester be bound hand and foot in the chains of this Delilah, we will see whether ambition will not give him strength to break them. It was but an allegory, that tale of Samson. Pleasure was the fair Philistine; ambition the strength-giving hair of the Nazarite, which might be cut off for a time, but grew again in the lap of satiety; and though they blinded him, he slew them all.—He plucked ruin on his own head, it is true; and such may be the case with this man.—Well, we shall see!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was a fine clear morning in September, when, mounted on a powerful horse, and quite alone, William Seymour began his journey towards Buckinghamshire. Seldom were more joyful feelings in the heart of any one; he was going to unite for ever his fate to her he loved best on earth; nothing had occurred to interrupt his proceedings; the eyes of policy seemed blinded; the very prying spirit of courtly scandal had not penetrated his secret. All his preparations were made. The ring upon the finger, and the benediction of the Church, was all that was wanted to render Arabella his own. On, on he sped then, with an eager spur, and with little apprehension of meeting any one who was likely to carry intelligence of his journey to the court, which had now removed to Greenwich.

Taking the shortest way as it then lay, he crossed the Thames by the Horseferry,—which, at that time, existed about a mile beyond Sunbury,—recrossed it again some miles higher up, and then spurred on into Buckinghamshire through the deep beech woods, whose green leaves were beginning to show the bronzing hand of time. He

did not now approach the house of Lord Shrewsbury from the side of the river, but passing by Burnham and Hedsor, took a circuit round towards the great gates of the park.

He was still about a mile distant, and the day had not yet reached the tenth hour, when he observed a man on horseback, apparently looking out for something in one of the neighbouring woods, about a quarter of a mile in advance. Taking it for one of the keepers watching the game, he rode on at the same quick pace; but the moment after, the person whom he had perceived put his horse into a quick trot, and advanced towards him.

The figure was familiar to his eye, and in a minute after, as they approached nearer to each other, Seymour recognised Sir Harry West. An undefined feeling of apprehension seized upon him; though he had expected to find the old knight at Malvoisie; for it had been agreed that he should be invited to act as father to the bride, as the Earl of Shrewsbury declined to take any part in the business. But then, what brought him out at that early hour, if nothing had gone wrong? and the first question William Seymour asked, as they met, was, "Is anything the matter?"

"Quick, quick," cried Sir Harry, laying his hand upon his young friend's bridle rein. "Come with me as fast as possible down this lane. There is not an instant to lose;" and, turning Seymour's horse, he led him a prisoner to the mouth of a narrow green cart-road through the wood. Then freeing his bridle, he spurred on at a gallop, beckoning to the young gentleman to follow. Seymour did so in some consternation; and on they went as if they were hunting the deer, till, at the first turning to the right, where the woods concealed them from the high road, Sir Harry quitted the path he was following, and somewhat slackened his pace.

"Now, in heaven's name, tell me what is the matter!" exclaimed William Seymour, much alarmed.

"Why you have just escaped, by five minutes, the discovery of the whole," said Sir Harry West. "Late last night arrived at Malvoisie Sir Thomas Overbury and Chaloner, with the King's commands for the Lady Arabella to join the court at Greenwich. Not knowing when you would arrive, or by what road, we have been most anxious, as you may suppose; and they, as if they had some suspicion, and were determined to detect you, have arranged, that as the lady chose to go by water in the Earl's barge, Chaloner should accompany her; while Over-

bury, who says his complexion is delicate, is to proceed with his men by the high road. The Countess has promised to detain him as long as possible, in order that he might not meet you at the gates; and while your own two men have been sent, one upon the river, and the other by the lower road, to give you warning, I came out here to watch for you, expecting every moment to see Overbury at my heels."

"How often disappointment meets us at the gates of expectation!" exclaimed Seymour. "What is to be done now, Sir Harry?—Do you imagine they have discovered anything?"

"In truth I cannot say," answered Sir Harry West; "I hope and trust not, for no hint has been given, even of a suspicion. But, at all events, the Countess will let us know when we see her, for she is determined to gain some intelligence from Overbury; and you may trust to her shrewd wit for arriving at the truth."

"But what is to be done now?" cried Seymour again, in a tone of despair. "What is to be done now?"

"The first thing to be done," replied Sir Harry West, "is for you to come with me to the gamekeeper's cottage, and there to lie concealed, till the Countess sends us word that these people are gone. As for the rest, William, this is but a silly business. Methinks the world is losing its wits; and that for this same idle passion of love, men are casting from them all those great considerations which are, in fact, the first in life. Here is the Earl of Devonshire breaks down the noblest name that any man in his own day has created for himself, and all for what?—A harlot!"

"Oh, name her not," exclaimed Seymour, indignantly, "name her not in the same breath with Arabella. If that woman be not worth—as she is not—the lightest thought of an honourable man, she whom I love is surely, by her virtues as well as graces, an object for which any man might sacrifice the highest fortunes of the world without a sigh. What is it that we seek on earth, but happiness, Sir Harry? All other objects of ambition are but means to that great end; and it is but in estimating well that in which happiness consists, that men show the difference of their natures. Where?—I ask you, my good friend—where could I find any object equal to that I should lose in her, if she be lost?—to that which I shall gain in her, if she be gained? What can one win by the unfruitful glory of the sword, but the malediction of thousands if we make it the object of ambition? The only just cause is our country's

good ; and noble love has always strengthened, rather than depressed, the powers and energies of those who fight in an honest quarrel. What are the poor contentions of the cabinet, or the small and mean ambitions of a court? The weights under which all good things are pressed out of the felon spirit. But such love as I feel for her, and she for me, will not only give happiness to both, but, founded in high and honourable passion, will strengthen and support us in every principle of right, and every worthy endeavour."

" 'Tis all very true, my young friend," replied Sir Harry West, "and I never for a moment thought of comparing this sweet lady with that bad woman, Rich. Nevertheless, with the impediments that have stared you in the face from the beginning, with the danger of bringing misery upon her as well as yourself, I cannot but say it would have been wiser far to have refrained, to have nipped the growing passion in the bud, and never to have let it take such firm root that it could not be plucked up. It is a silly business, Seymour, I repeat ; and God send it prove not sad as well as silly.—However, as it has gone thus far, it must needs now go on ; and I must help it, I suppose ; for it is never fear for myself that urges me, when I strive to dissuade a friend from a dangerous course, which may involve me with him. We can determine upon nothing yet, till we hear what news the Countess has obtained.—On my life, I know not well my way to this game-keeper's house, but as we are out of sight of the road it does not so much matter."

They wandered near half a mile out of their way ; but at length, after considerable search, came to a keeper's dwelling in the wood, where the first question of Sir Harry West was, whether any message had been sent to him from the house.

"No, sir," replied the keeper's wife, who was busily preparing her husband's dinner against his return. "There has been nobody from the house at all. Shall I send up the little boy to see?"

Sir Harry answered in the negative, and only begged leave to remain there for a while with his friend, as he expected a messenger speedily.

Casting himself down on a chest in the window, Seymour gave himself up to his melancholy thoughts, while Sir Harry West stood in the door-way, watching against accident or surprise. We need not picture to the reader the state of mind of the disappointed lover as he sat there, with memory brooding over his broken hopes, and imagi-

nation darkening the future. One half hour passed by after another, and no one appeared, till at length the keeper himself came in, and instantly recognised the old knight and his young companion, both of whom he had previously seen.

"Which way did you come, Harding?" demanded Sir Harry.

"I came across the horse road from the water, sir," replied the man, and should have been here before; but I just stopped for a minute, to give a clout on the head to one of those courtier fellows, who was teasing Lady Arabella's gentlewoman."

"Ha!" cried Sir Harry West, with a look of immediate interest, "what gentlewoman was that?"

"She they call the Signora," answered the man, "and a nice young lady she is, though she do speak English with a queer outlandish twang."

"Where was this?" exclaimed the old knight, with his eyes sparkling with unwonted fire. "By heaven! I will crop his ears for him, if he be one of the best of them."

"No need of that, sir," answered the man, "he's but a poor creature, and can't do any one much harm. I saw him run after the young lady from the lower terrace, and thought not much about it; but taking across the covert, to see after the game as I went, I came upon him a quarter of a mile up there, teasing her sadly. So I told him to let her alone; upon which he called me a clown; and I gave him a touch—just a little touch—with the flat of my hand upon the side of his head, when down he went like a nine-pin. He got up again, however, and went off towards the house; so after that I said good day, ma'am, and came away—I hate those courtiers."

"So do I," replied the knight; "but this shows us, Seymour, that some of them are there still. So we must even share your pottage with you, Harding, for neither Mr. Seymour nor I will go, while they are there."

"Right welcome, sir, right welcome," replied the keeper; "this being Thursday, we always make plenty, to last till the end of the week."

As he spoke, a hand was laid upon the latch, and the next instant Ida Mara entered. As soon as she saw the old knight, who advanced to meet her, she put her hand in his with a look of deep and grateful affliction, saying, "I have been stopped and troubled, sir, or I would have been here half an hour ago.—The Countess has sent me to tell you that they are not gone. They stay over the

noon meal. As soon as they are away, she will send to you."

As she spoke, she made a low inclination of the head to Seymour, but addressed herself to Sir Harry West.

"Who was this that troubled you?" asked the old knight; "the keeper has been telling me about him. Who was he, Ida? Old as I am, I am young enough to slit a coxcomb's ears."

"Mind him not, mind him not, dear Sir Harry," cried the girl, laughing. "At the court I am obliged, very often, to give rude answers to such idle things as that. All I cared for was, that he followed me wherever I turned, and stopped me from coming hither."

"Then the Lady Arabella is not gone?" asked Seymour, somewhat impatient at this episode.

"Oh yes, sir," replied Ida Mara, "she went near two hours ago, leaving me to follow with one of the maids and her apparel."

Seymour cast down his eyes, and clasped one hand tight upon the other; and the girl, turning to the keeper, thanked him in as courteous terms and graceful language as if she had been bred amongst the highest of the land. Then, looking to Sir Harry, she said, "I will go back now, sir, for fear they should track me here."

"You must not go alone," replied the old knight. "You may meet with insult by the way, my dear. I will go with you, till you are near the house."

"Let me go, sir," cried the keeper; "the jackanape will run fast enough if he sees me."

"That he will," replied Ida Mara; "but you struck him too hard. I thought you had killed him."

"Pooh!" answered the man, "I only gave him a touch. Those things ar'n't so easily killed—they've got nine lives, like a cat. I'll be back again in a minute, good wife, so don't wait for me."

In about an hour and a half after Ida Mara's visit, a loud whoop was heard on the outside of the cottage, and Harding started up to open the door, crying, "That's my Lord." "Come, Sir Harry, come," exclaimed the Earl of Shrewsbury, entering. "Come, Seymour, come, the land is clear of the enemy.—Bring their horses up, Harding.—How are you, William, how are you?" and he shook his young friend's hand cordially. "Nay, look not so sad," he continued, as they walked along; "all is not lost that is delayed. With such a politician behind your hand, as my good wife, you have nothing to fear. Whatever Mary Cavendish makes up her mind to have done, depend

upon it will be done. If she were to set her heart upon marrying me to the prettiest lady of all the court, I should expect that she would carry me to the altar within a week, and get an act of parliament for bigamy. It's lucky enough that what she determines is generally right, otherwise the world would soon be in confusion."

"But what has she discovered, my dear lord?" demanded Sir Harry West.

"Good faith, she must tell you all about it herself," replied the Earl. "I wish you could have been there to see how she twisted this politic boy, Overbury, round her finger; and without telling him anything but what was true, made him believe exactly what she liked. All I know is, that she is now his confidant, is aware of all his plans and purposes; and that he looks to her for help to carry them into execution, when, good life, if she does not thwart them all, I am not Shrewsbury.—Come, cheer thee up, William, cheer thee up, or my lady will call thee the melancholy man; she has had no name for poor Arabella since last night but Wheyface; and certainly the girl, what with fright at the thought of matrimony, and then fear of no matrimony, has lost half her roses. But as the Countess vows that you shall be married ere a fortnight pass, be you sure it will be so, if all the kings between this and Bagdad were to say you nay."

"That is some consolation at least," replied Seymour, with the first smile that had lighted his countenance since his arrival: and in such conversation they proceeded till they came within sight of the house, when, seeing the Countess walking upon the terrace, the young gentleman hurried his pace, and joined her before the other two came up.

"We have had a narrow escape, William," said Lady Shrewsbury, after the first salutation. "If these coxcombs had but waited a few hours, we should have had some unwelcome wedding guests."

"A most unfortunate event, indeed," replied Seymour, who could not master his disappointment. "Have you discovered how this accident befel?"

"Nay, call it not unfortunate, foolish fellow," replied the lady. "You young men, the moment they cannot have all their own way, look at nothing but the evil, though it be no bigger than a grain of seed, and forget to thank God for the good, though there be a mountain of it. We have more need to rejoice at our luck, than cry out upon fortune, even if it were but that we have escaped detection. But there's a great deal more than that; and it is

altogether the luckiest turn that matters could have taken. I wish to heaven you could have seen this upstart Overbury, this minion's minion, with his wit and his wisdom, and how he helped to take himself in, both last night and this morning. 'Twas a rare sight, I can assure you. Here's my lord will tell you how I played the youth, as a skilful angler does a mighty trout; and how he floundered and spent his strength, till he was fain to let me land him on the bank, completely at my mercy. We spoke of all things, Arabella and you, and his own plans and purposes; and I explained to him in good set terms what I should expect for my niece, if ever she condescended to give her hand to Robert Carr. First, he must make her a duchess. There he was ready to meet me; he was sure the King would consent to that. Did he not make Philip Herbert knight, baron, viscount, and earl, in one day? and what could he refuse to Carr? Then I declared that I must have three thousand pounds per annum settled on the lady. This staggered him a little, the treasury being empty; but he ended by saying, that my Lord of Rochester's estates might well bear that; whereat I smiled upon him most graciously, fell into thought, and smiled again; after which he asked the meaning of my looks. I answered that he brought to my mind a bold ambassador, who, once suing to a king for something on which his master had set his heart, made no scruple to promise everything required as an equivalent. First, it was the hand of his sovereign's daughter; then an enormous dowry; then a province of the kingdom; and, when the other party asked in jest an island in the Indian Ocean, belonging to heaven knows whom, he replied, it too should be given—if it could be procured. Thereat he laughed, and said that he could assure me all he promised he could perform."

"What answered you to that, lady?" asked Seymour.

"I said—now for the island in the Indian Ocean," answered the Countess; "there is one thing more, good Sir Thomas Overbury, before I suffer my niece to be moved in this suit: I must see her freed entirely from the shackles with which the King has been pleased to fetter her. I must have in my hand the King's consent to her marrying a subject; otherwise she may be trifled with, her expectations raised, her affections gained, and then a flat refusal come at length, and all her hopes be blighted."

"But, dear lady," exclaimed Seymour, "methinks you were but showing him the road to travel to his object."

"Hush, silly youth," cried the Countess. "Do you recollect the story of that Grecian wench, who threw golden

apples in the way of those with whom she ran a race? What did she want but time? and so did I. But the scheme answered better than my hopes. He replied, that I should have that too; to which I answered in a mocking tone, 'if it can be procured.' He hesitated a little, thought deeply, and then said, 'Madam, it has been procured.' This startled me; but I rejoined, 'For my own justification, sir, before I take one step, I must have it in my hand. Lord Rochester must send it to me.' Then came a longer fit of hesitation still, at the end of which he answered, 'Lord Rochester has not got it, madam; but I have.' I felt so angry that I was afraid of myself, knowing right well that a look or a word might betray me; but I mastered it all, and ere he could see how frightened I was to find the matter had gone so far, I had got a look of sudden satisfaction on my face, which would have cheated the Wicked One himself if he had been there. 'Indeed,' I cried; 'well, then, you have the game in your own hand; whenever you like to play that card, you may. But recollect, sir,' I added, in a lower tone, so that my good husband might not hear, for he might have spoiled all—'but recollect, sir, if I do give my consent, and bring this thing about—I do not say I will, remember—but if I do, I shall expect something for my Lord of Shrewsbury.' Could you have seen his face, William—he thought he had the whole secret now, as clearly as if I had laid my heart in his hand. He fancied Mary Cavendish one of his own greedy and exacting tribe, who would sell their soul's salvation for a rose noble; and he answered that what I wished would be easily accomplished. 'The Earl's rank and station,' he said, 'would ensure him anything he thought fit to ask;' and he added, 'if my playing that card, lady, be all that is required to win the game, here is the ace of trumps;' and thereupon, out of a silken book kept snugly in his pouch, he took a paper, and held it forth between his finger and thumb. Good faith, if I had known what it was, I would have clutched it in an instant; but I thought to see the name of Robert Carr staring me full in the face; and I cast about in my own mind what I should say to parry that, without undeceiving him; so I answered, 'We have not settled yet what the Earl is to receive; when you let me know what the King's bounty may be pleased to confer, it will be time for me to take the paper;' and I put it away with the back of my hand, as Cæsar did the crown. My very unwillingness deceived him more: had I longed for it, he would not have given it; but now he thrust it on me. 'Take it, madam, take it,' he said, 'and within a week you

shall hear what can be done. I am sure your Ladyship will be moderate in your views, recollecting what a claim the union of your niece with a gentleman standing so high in the King's favour may establish for the future, even though you do not obtain all that you can desire at once.' I answered, proudly, that neither the house of Cavendish nor Talbot had ever shown themselves greedy or exacting. But that, of course, we should consult our own dignity; and so I took the paper—thinking that by accident it might fall into the fire. I did not look at it till he was gone. Luckily I did not, for I think I should have screamed with joy."

"What did you find?" cried Seymour, "what did you find?"

"His Majesty's full and despotic consent," exclaimed the Countess, "to Arabella's marriage with any subject she may choose in the realm. I clapped my hands till Shrewsbury thought me mad; and I have it safe, good youth, I have it safe." *

The first expression on Seymour's countenance was joy, but the second was doubt and apprehension. "That is indeed something gained," he said, "yet I cannot but fear that you have pledged yourself, dear Countess, to aid in bringing about Arabella's marriage with this upstart minion of the King."

"And so I will," cried Lady Shrewsbury; "so I will, if she do not first give her hand to some one else. I know all you would say, so hold your tongue, for 'tis but folly. Granted that, with the encouragement he has received, this deputy love-maker may hurry on the affair; cannot I refuse whatever he offers? Leave woman's wit to frustrate man's policy. Believe me, you are no match for us in that. 'Tis only force we fear. Come hither, my good Lord," she continued, raising her voice to the Earl, who stood talking with Sir Harry West upon the terrace below, "come hither, and give us your counsel; and you, good knight, come too."

The Earl mounted the steps with a good-humoured, but determined look, replying, as he came up, "I tell thee, housewife, I will have nought to do with it. Though you think you have gained a step, I see no great advantage; and all I say is, if the matter must go forward, the sooner it is done the better."

"It must go forward now, my Lord, I believe," said Sir

* It is proved incontrovertibly by Mr. Lodge, from papers, amongst the Harleian manuscripts, that such a permission had been obtained from the King, and that upon it the Lady Arabella acted.

Harry West; "I could have wished it had never been begun; but, as the lady's heart is fully engaged, as Seymour is mad upon this theme, and as—if I understand you right—she must either marry him, or that pitiful creature Carr, there is no choice. On my life! I would rather wed her myself than she should give her hand to that poor minion."

"Out, misanthrope!" exclaimed the Countess; "we will call him the woman-hater. He talks of wedding the sweetest lady in the land, as if it were giving himself over to purgatory."

"I should have said," replied Sir Harry, "it were better for her to marry me than Carr; for although up to this present time, he has demeaned himself somewhat moderately, yet I see the seeds of strong, bad passions in him just shooting, and also that weakness of nature, which is, perhaps, more dangerous in a man placed at the height of power, than the worst qualities in one who has vigorous sense to guide or to restrain them. Miserable indeed will the woman be who links her fate with his."

"Arabella shall neither marry you nor him," replied the Countess, laughing. "Here stands the worshipful bridegroom elect; and the thing for us now to consider is, what is next to be done? It is now two of the clock; the good youth has ridden five-and-thirty miles; he must have some rest, and some food; but yet I would give a great deal, that he could show himself in Hertford to-night."

"That is easily done," replied William Seymour; "my horse will carry me well. 'Tis not more than forty miles, I think. But what is the object?"

"Nay," answered the Countess, "you can pause at Hatfield, then write me a short letter to my Lord of Salisbury, requesting permission to attend the court. Send it off the instant you arrive: so will your visit here this day be concealed; and what I have said to Overbury will banish all fear."

"I rather fancy, fair dame," said the Earl, "your own plots and conspiracies make you think that the people suspect more than they do. When I was at the court on Thursday last, the rumour of that business before the Council had blown by. Nobody thought of it any more; or if they did, 'twas but to laugh at it. Cecil said that the King seemed as jealous of the Lady Arabella as an Italian of his mistress, fancying people in love with her who never thought of her."

"Well, well," cried the Countess, impatiently, "we cannot be too secure. The lad shall have some dinner, and

then set off. You must mount one of his servants, Shrewsbury; and if he follow my directions, ere four days be over Arabella shall be his. Come hither, come hither with me, William. You give orders about the horses, my Lord—that is no part of the plot, you know;” and leaning upon Seymour’s arm, she walked with him into the hall, where preparations for a meal were already made.

“There, sit down and refresh yourself,” said Lady Shrewsbury, “and listen to me while you eat and drink. You need not stay in the room, Jonah.”

The servant to whom she spoke withdrew, closing the door behind him, and the Countess then remained in thought for a moment, after which she exclaimed, “All we shall want is a parson; the banns have been duly published; I will bring up a certificate to that effect, and meet you at Greenwich to-morrow, or the next day. You must find some good serviceable priest, who will not scruple to join your hand and Arabella’s in her own chamber or mine. Sir Harry West shall give her away; and you must provide yourself with another witness whom you can trust; for the dear girl’s fair name must not suffer.”

“Oh, Rodney, Rodney is the man,” replied Seymour; “he is full of all excesses of love and honour; and there is no chance of his betraying our secret, if it be not in a sonnet addressed to my fair grandmother.”

The Countess laughed, and her young friend proceeded: “He, too, I doubt not, can find me a clergyman, who will do all that is needful. Will you, dear lady, prepare Arabella? for it may so happen, that I have no opportunity of speaking to her alone.”

“All that shall be done,” answered the Countess; “and I, too, will take care to fix upon some day when the court shall have business on its hands; so that our proceedings be unwatched. However, you must both get out of the country as fast as possible. Are you prepared with means?”

“All is done,” answered Seymour. “Lord Hertford gave me a thousand pounds to pay our first expenses; the ship is in the mouth of the river, only waiting for us to sail. Now, lady, I am ready,” he continued, rising.

“Nay, take another cup of wine,” said the Countess; “have the priest, with a friend, prepared at Greenwich, and leave all the rest to me.”

Seymour promised, with right good will, to fail in nothing that depended on him; and then, taking his leave of Lady Shrewsbury, he bade farewell to the Earl and Sir Harry West, mounted on his horse, and, followed by one

servant, rode away across the country. So far the scheme proved successful: he reached Hertford in time to despatch a note to Lord Salisbury that night; and no one in the court suspected that he had been in Buckinghamshire for many a month. Even Arabella herself heard on the following morning that he had been seen during the preceding evening at a great distance from the spot where she had fancied he must be, and concluded that he must have obtained intelligence of Overbury's visit to Malvoisie.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THERE was a grand pageant at the court, on some one of those many occasions which, in that day, afforded the excuse for revelling and merriment, not of the most refined and intellectual kind. The morning had passed in tilting; there was a masque and dancing in the evening; and all the state rooms of the old palace at Greenwich had been thrown open, for the reception of guests invited from London and the neighbourhood, and for the multitude of noble persons who usually thronged the royal residence.

There was music and dancing going on in the great hall; and beyond, through a vista of rooms and corridors, groups were seen moving about, glittering in all the splendid costume of that day; while the faces of servants and attendants might be caught peeping in at doorways and open windows, or hurrying about, either carrying refreshments to those who needed them, or to prepare for a grand banquet in the farthest hall of the suite, with which the pleasures of the night were to close.

Arabella Stuart, who had been dancing, in order not to seem unlike the rest, now stood in the group near the Queen; and to say the truth, although William Seymour was not present, she looked gayer and more cheerful than she had done for several days. Nor was the brightness of her aspect assumed, as had been too frequently the case in her short life; but it had a cause in the conduct of others. It was not that any particular attention or kindness had been shown to her, but rather the reverse; for she was well inclined to be as little noticed as possible. The truth is, however, that a scene was taking place before her eyes, which, however much it might offend the pure delicacy of her feelings, relieved her from a great apprehension.

Twice since she had been at the palace, Sir Thomas

Overbury had found occasion to hint at Lord Rochester's suit; and although she had been but once seen by that personage himself, she had dreaded, when she entered the hall, that she might be the object of painful attentions. He was now before her, however, and seemed scarcely to know that she was in the room. His whole thoughts, his whole feelings, his looks, his conversation, were absorbed by the bright and beautiful Countess of Essex; and never, perhaps, on any occasion was such a wild and shameless display of illicit love offered to the eyes of a multitude as was now afforded by those two unhappy people.

The King looked on and laughed; but the Queen, even light as she was, felt pained and indignant; and Sir Thomas Overbury from time to time grasped his sword belt with an involuntary movement, nearly tearing it from his side.

His irritation was not particularly allayed by some words of the Countess of Shrewsbury, who, in passing near him, paused for a moment, and said, "You see, Sir Thomas! What must the Lady Arabella think of this?"

She waited for no answer, but walked on: and the young knight turned to one of the windows, which were open to admit the air, for the night was hot and sultry.

Scarcely had the Countess quitted him, when a gentleman of two or three and thirty years of age, tall, graceful, and dressed in splendid but somewhat fantastic habiliments, of sky-blue silk and gold, approached her, and asked if she would dance a measure.

"I am an old woman, Sir George," replied Lady Shrewsbury, looking round to several persons who stood near, "and though your taste may run in that way, I cannot favour you. Give me your arm, however; I will walk down the hall with you to get some breath, for here I am stifled."

They walked on beyond the dancers; and, as soon as they were somewhat clear of the numbers which thronged the hall, the Countess gave her companion an inquiring look.

"Now or never, beautiful lady," said Sir George Rodney; "the priest and Seymour are in the little ante-chamber, between the Lady Arabella's apartments and your own. Sir Harry West and the dark-eyed Italian girl are watching them, lest, like two lions, they should devour each other."

"But it is before the time," replied Lady Shrewsbury, "and I determined that I would not tell her a word, till the last moment. I have not an instant to do so."

"Nay, it is the time to a minute," answered Sir George Rodney; "they were long ere they began the dance. Seize the opportunity, lady, seize the opportunity. The happy moment always has swallow's wings. So catch it while you can."

"I will try and speak with her now," said the Countess, "and bring her away if possible; but we must have a little time. Come with me; I know you will be ready to play your part, whatever it may be;" and moving slowly back to the spot where Arabella stood, she placed herself next to her niece, while Sir George Rodney contrived to insinuate himself on the other side, between her and the Earl of Montgomery, who stood near.

"This gay gallant, Arabella," said the Countess aloud, "wishes me to make myself ridiculous by dancing with him. Will you take compassion on him, fair niece?"

"It is too warm and close to be compassionate," replied Arabella, with a smile; "I will wait a little, Sir George, by your good leave."

At that moment, Lord Montgomery turned to answer some question of the Queen; and the Countess, approaching her lips close to Arabella's ear, whispered a few words in a hurried manner.

She had not calculated the degree of her niece's firmness well. A sudden paleness spread itself over Arabella's face; and after gasping a moment for breath, she sank down upon one of the low stools, while Lady Shrewsbury had just time to catch her drooping head upon her arm.

An immediate bustle took place around the spot; but Sir George Rodney exclaimed, "'Tis nothing but a swoon from the heat! She will be better in an instant, your Majesty. I will carry her into the ante-chamber for air;" and raising her, stool and all, he bore her through a door behind the throne, while the Countess supported her head.

Several persons followed, but returned one by one, saying that the lady was somewhat better; and some of the light wits began to laugh, and say that it was more the warmth of Lord Rochester's manner to the Countess of Essex, than the warmth of the room, that had affected the Lady Arabella. In a minute or two Lady Shrewsbury reappeared, and in a low tone told the Queen that her niece had somewhat recovered, but she feared would not be able to rejoin the royal party.

"We will take her to her own room," she said, "and, by your Majesty's gracious permission, I will sit with her for half-an-hour."

She then rejoined Arabella, who was seated in the ante-chamber, with Sir George Rodney still beside her, together with a young lady belonging to the court.

"She will do well now, Lady Lucy," said the Countess; "pray go back to the Queen. Rodney and I will take care of her. Repeat her some of your verses, Sir George, and make her laugh.—Nay, indeed, I will not have you stay, sweet girl," she continued, taking her young friend by the hand, and leading her back to the door of the ball-room; "I will bring you a good account of her in half-an-hour.—Now Arabella," she added, in a low voice, when the door was closed, "be firm, my dear. Remember for what a stake we all play."

Arabella turned her eyes with a look of timid apprehension from the face of her aunt to that of Sir George Rodney.

"He knows all, my sweet niece," said the Countess; "he is to be one of the witnesses. Be resolute, my love, be resolute."

"I will, I will, dear aunt," replied Arabella, faintly; "but I was not prepared."

"The less preparation the better," answered the Countess. "Give her your arm, Sir George. Take mine on this side, Arabel.—Can you go?"

"One moment, one moment!" said Arabella, putting her hand before her eyes, while her lips moved in silence for an instant, as if the heart uttered some prayer unheard.

"Now I am ready," she added; and rising with their assistance, she suffered them to lead her slowly to her room. They entered by the door from the staircase; and she looked round anxiously, while the colour mounted into her cheek. Then seeing no one there but Ida Mara, who ran towards her and kissed her hand, she sank into a seat and bent down her fair head.

"Now lock that door," said the Countess, pointing to the one by which they had just come in.

Ida Mara hastened to obey; and Lady Shrewsbury continued, for a minute or two, to whisper words of comfort and support. She then made a sign to Ida Mara, who therefore opened the other door at the further side of the chamber, and spoke for an instant to some persons behind. The moment after, there were steps heard in the room; but Arabella raised not her head, and remained with her cheek pale, and her eyes bent down upon the ground.

"Will you not speak to me, my beloved?" asked William Seymour, taking her hand.

"She has been ill, Seymour—she fainted," said the Countess of Shrewsbury. "I told her of the matter too abruptly."

"But have you any doubt or hesitation?" inquired William Seymour, still addressing Arabella; "if you have, speak, my beloved. I will never exact the fulfilment of a promise from which you may wish yourself released. Have you any doubt or hesitation?"

"Oh, no, no, William," replied Arabella, with the colour mounting in her cheek: "none, none, whatsoever. Agitated I must be—apprehensive I cannot help being, but doubt or hesitation, I have none. With the same free heart wherewith I promised you my hand, I will give it now; and it is all I have to give. I wish it were a jewel worth an Emperor's crown, for your sake."

"It is worth more to me," answered Seymour, "than the brightest crown that ever graced this earth. Come, Arabella, all is ready, dear one."

"But tell me," asked Arabella, anxiously, "are we to fly to-night—I fear I have scarcely strength."

"Oh, no," replied William Seymour, "'tis but that the indissoluble bond may bind us to each other, Arabella. We must choose the moment for flight afterwards, when opportunity serves."

Arabella still paused in thought, but the Countess took her hand, saying, "Come, dear girl, come! You must recollect that if I and Sir George Rodney are much longer away from the court, it may be remarked."

The lady looked round; and seeing good Sir Harry West standing near, she held out her hand to him, saying, "Thank you, Sir Harry, this is very kind of you. You have indeed been a father to me often."

At that moment some one tried the door, which had been locked, and then knocked for admission; and, at a sign from the Countess, the whole party of gentlemen retired into the ante-room, between that chamber and her own apartments, while Ida Mara went slowly to the door, and asked who was there.

"It is I," answered the voice of one of Anne of Denmark's ladies.

"Open the door, girl, open the door," cried the Countess aloud; and the moment after, a young and pretty woman entered, and, approaching Arabella, said, "Her Majesty has sent me to ask how you fare, dear lady."

"Present my humble duty to her," replied Arabella, whose frame trembled with agitation and alarm, "and pray tell her I am somewhat better. My aunt will stay

with me a little while, I hope ; but I fear I shall not be able to come down again to-night."

"She does not expect you," said the lady ; "but I may tell her Majesty you are really better, may I not?"

"Oh, yes! much, much," answered Arabella ; and with a kind nod and look, the girl hastened back to the gay scene, in which her young light heart found its pleasure, the door was once more locked, and the fest of the marriage party recalled to the room.

"I will not keep you any longer," said Arabella Stuart, rising, "it might be dangerous to you, Seymour.—I am quite ready," she added, raising her eyes to his face, while a warm blush covered her cheek. "This marriage is legal, sir, I suppose?" she continued, turning her eyes to the clergyman, who had come in with her lover and Sir Harry West.

"Quite, madam," he replied ; "once celebrated, no power on earth can dissolve it, so long as the marriage-vow be kept."

Arabella bowed her head ; and the parties being arranged in order, the ceremony proceeded, and concluded uninterrupted. Arabella answered firmly and confidently, and pledged herself for ever to William Seymour, with the fullest assurance of happiness, so far as it was in his power to bestow it.

"Now, Rodney, away," cried the Countess of Shrewsbury ; "go round by the passages below, and in by the other door. Say, if any one asks, that you left the lady much better ; and that I will be down in a few minutes. Away! away! Sir George!"

Sir George Rodney advanced a step, took Arabella's hand, and bending gracefully, pressed his lips upon it, and then retired by the Countess of Shrewsbury's apartments.

He was followed in a moment or two by the clergyman and Sir Harry West ; and in about half an hour, Lady Shrewsbury reappeared in the hall of the palace, and mingled with the gay crowd below.

Many were the inquiries after the Lady Arabella, from those who could love and appreciate virtue and excellence, though they might tolerate vice and folly. But Lady Shrewsbury answered, with her usual self-possession, that her niece was better, indeed quite well, but that she feared to encounter the heat again ; and the subject soon dropped and was forgotten.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WE must once more introduce the reader into that school for idle speculation, the ante-chamber of a palace, where four young men were sitting, amusing themselves at the expense of their neighbours, and of each other. One of the principal personages was he whom we have denominated Bradshaw; another was an esquire, called Graham, of about twenty years of age; another, a youth of the name of Blount, a distant relation of the celebrated Earl of Devonshire; and the fourth was the young Sir Charles Ramsay.

The day was wearing towards its close, and already the sky, which, during the whole afternoon, had been clear and bright, was becoming purple with the setting sun. The broad river, flowing on, glowed like a ruby, in the light of evening; and the white sails of the boats, as they flitted by, were tinged with the same rosy hue.

"Come, let us go out and have a sail upon the water," said Ramsay, speaking to Blount; "here are Bradshaw and Graham, quite enough for all the King's purposes, and I hate being stived up here for so many hours together."

"Wait till Overbury comes out," said Bradshaw, "and I will go with you. It is Graham's turn to wait; and after six, the old gossip requires only one."

Princes little know how ill-chosen attendants speak of them, almost within ear-shot. A king who suffers the licentious in his ante-chamber, may be certain that their libertine tongues will make free with himself.

"How long Overbury stays!" said another; "if Rochester does not mind, he will supplant him in James's favour."

"He does not seem particularly high in Carr's favour just now," rejoined Graham; "for he has been hunting him all the morning, and the noble lord favourite has avoided him vigorously and successfully."

"I saw them dodging each other through the courts this morning," said Blount, "like boys playing at hide and seek."

"Ah, Rochester was dodging somebody else," answered Bradshaw; "for there was Lady Essex, with a homely gown and servant's farthingale on, a white satin mask, and a veil over her head, stole out by the west gate, and through the water-port of the park. There was a barge waiting; and Rochester drew off from Overbury like a sly old fox breaking cover quietly, and glided down under the wall to

the stairs, then into the barge with my lady, and away. She thought I did not know her, but one of Essex's bright eyes is not to be mistaken, whether it shines through black velvet or white satin."

"I'll bet you an angel to a pint of Burgundy," said Blount, "that Overbury wanted to scold Rochester for the business of last night; and, to say truth, it was somewhat gross, his going on so with Mistress Essex before the Lady Arabella's eyes."

"I did not know that she was so far gone as to faint for him," said Ramsay. "By Apollo, I think I have a better leg than he has!"

"The broken one was the best leg he ever had to stand upon," answered Bradshaw. "But are you of those who fancy that beautiful Bella fainted for him? I doubt it much, I doubt it much."

"Oh, the thing was very evident," cried Blount.

"It may be so," answered Bradshaw; "but if ever I saw man, William Seymour was at the palace last night. He was wrapped up in a great cloak, with his hat flapped over his face, just coming up from the water-side when I walked down the arcade."

"You are in the luck of discovering people in disguise," said Ramsay; "the King had better send you to the mouth of the Thames to inspect all the vessels that pass, for this poor devil, Legate."

"Who is he? what of him?" asked Bradshaw.

"What! have you not seen the proclamation," cried Blount, "commanding all the King's subjects, and especially his officers of customs and the ports, to examine strictly all outward-bound vessels, and ascertain that one Bartholomew Legate, accused of heresy, does not escape from the realm; and to bring him, and all other persons attempting unlawfully to fly the kingdom, before his Majesty, or his court of the Star Chamber?"

"No," answered Bradshaw, "I have seen nothing about it. But I hope they won't catch him soon."

"Why?" demanded Graham; "are you a heretic too?"

"No," replied Bradshaw; "but still I hope they will not catch him soon; for this is too warm weather to enjoy a fire in Smithfield.—Then there is a sort of embargo established?"

"Not quite that," rejoined Blount; "a strict search, that is all. But here comes the favourite's favourite! I hear the King's door go. Let us treat him with all due respect."

The moment after, Sir Thomas Overbury passed through

the ante-chamber, with a slow step and a gloomy brow. The four gentlemen drew back, two on either side, and made him a low and formal bow as he went. Overbury knowing that they were mocking him, merely inclined his head and walked on; but the instant he was gone, the four burst into a loud laugh, and began to comment upon his character without much mercy.

In the meanwhile the knight proceeded through the adjoining passage, little caring what they said or thought, occupied with far more unpleasant reflections. He descended a back staircase of the palace, took one or two turns up and down in the open air of the nearest court, and several times put his hand to his brow, as if it ached.

"If Arabella," he muttered to himself, "be but as infatuated with him as the King, the matter may still go forward; but it will need infatuation indeed to keep up his favour with either of them. The man has gone mad, that is clear. I have often heard of the power of a bad woman, but never knew it went to such an extent. Heaven and earth, what a world this is!—I will go sail upon the Thames, and see whether the cool air will take the fire out of my brain; the sun is just down, and the moon will soon be up. I like the moonlight on the water; it puts me in mind of my father's house.—I often wish I were a boy again, and in my quiet home. Not all the glitter of courtly life, nor the joy of successful ambition, is worth one hour of holiday boyhood's pure, unalloyed happiness after all."

As he thus thought, he bent his steps towards the river, and at the little stairs below those of the palace called a boat, which soon bore him down the stream towards Woolwich. He felt refreshed and calmed, and went sailing slowly on for near an hour. At the end of that time, he told the boatmen to turn; and the wind being now against them, and the tide in their favour, they pulled down the sail and took to their oars.

The moon had by this time risen, nearly at the full, and was pouring a flood of light over all things, tranquil and soft, like that which seems to shine from another sphere upon a spirit weaned from this earth's affections. The objects of the world around were all distinct and clear to the eye, though without the warmth and brightness of the day; and as the boat approached the stairs, another shot past it, rowed by two stout watermen, with a gentleman sitting in the stern, wrapped in a large cloak, and having his hat flapped over his eyes. There was something in the figure, however, which caught the attention of Sir

Thomas Overbury, and he bade his rowers ply their oars. The other gentleman reached the landing first, and had just stepped on shore, when the knight's boat glided up; and he himself, resolving to see who the stranger was, sprang up the steps, exclaiming, "My Lord, my Lord, I would fain speak with you."

"You are mistaken, sir," replied a voice, in what he thought an assumed tone; and the other gentleman walked on at a rapid pace.

Sir Thomas was about to follow as quickly; but one of the boatmen caught him by the sleeve, demanding his fare. The knight paid him immediately, and then walked forward as fast as possible upon the only road that led to the palace; but some minutes were lost, and by this time the stranger had disappeared, apparently through the great gates, into the outer court.

Overbury hurried on, and thought he caught a glimpse of the other's cloak turning the corner, towards that part of the building which, for some reason, was called the Ladies' lodging. In each floor of that mass of brick-work were several suites of apartments, occupied by different ladies of the court, and amongst others, the Lady Arabella Stuart. Below ran a low arcade, with a number of different doors, and staircases, and passages through the building, like those which are still to be seen at Hampton Court; and, as Overbury passed through the little archway leading from the outer court, he distinctly saw the figure of the stranger moving quickly along under the arcade.

It seemed to pause at the entrance of the staircase, which led first to a suite of apartments occupied by Lady Walsingham, and then to those of Arabella Stuart and the Countess of Shrewsbury, the latter of whom had accepted the royal invitation for a week, on the occasion of the festival of the preceding night. Overbury thought that the person he pursued entered that doorway, which, as was then customary, stood open. At all events, he did not see the figure proceed any further; and exclaiming, "Ha!" he advanced at once, entered the doorway, mounted the stairs, and knocked at the door of the Lady Arabella's chamber. It was opened almost immediately by Ida Mara, with a light.

"Can I speak for a few moments with the Lady Arabella?" said the knight.

"This is her bedchamber, sir," answered the pretty Italian, standing in the deep doorway, and only partially opening the door. "No one comes in by this door. You

must go round by the passage to Lady Shrewsbury's. The Lady Arabella is with the Countess.—That way, sir ;” and she pointed with her hand along a passage before him.

Without a moment's delay, Sir Thomas sped onward, and knocked at Lady Shrewsbury's door, making the same inquiry. He was instantly admitted, and somewhat to his surprise,—for a strong suspicion had taken possession of his mind,—he found Arabella calmly seated by the Countess, at an embroidery frame. Lady Shrewsbury rose with a cold and haughty air, saying, “Sir Thomas, after several things that have passed, I can suffer no such conversation as that which has lately taken place between you and me to be held in my niece's presence. Arabella, my love, you had better retire to your own apartments.”

The lady rose, and bowing slightly to the knight, without speaking, quitted the room.

We must now return, however, to the door of her chamber, at the top of the staircase. Scarcely had Sir Thomas Overbury been admitted to Lady Shrewsbury, when down the dark and winding steps leading to the chambers above, came the person whom the knight had pursued from the bank of the river. He knocked thrice, separately, and distinctly, at the door, which was instantly opened, and without a word he went in. In another moment, Arabella was in the arms of her husband. She held up her finger to him, however, saying, “Hush, love, hush! Speak low, Sir Thomas Overbury is with my aunt.”

“Oh! he cannot hear, my beloved,” replied William Seymour; “there is the ante-room between us and him. Did he come in this moment? for some one seemed to chase me from the water side, so that I concealed myself upon the stairs above. He knocked at the door too,—did he not, Ida?”

The Italian answered in the affirmative, and then withdrew to another room; and, after a few of the tender words of love, Seymour went on to speak of their future prospects.

“I fear, dear one,” he said, “that we must delay our projected flight. A proclamation was issued this morning, ordering strict search at all ports, for some less happy fugitive than ourselves; and, I understand, it is already rigorously in force. But turn not pale, my Arabella, there is no danger. Our marriage can be concealed easily for some weeks, till these impediments have been removed.”

“I shall never feel at ease,” replied Arabella, “in these

stolen interviews. Every time you are with me, Seymour, I shall expect to see you seized and dragged away—perhaps to a prison. At the first moment that it is possible, let us go. I would rather do anything, bear anything, than live in constant apprehension.”

“And I would bear much,” answered Seymour, “to call my Arabella mine in open day, to be with her every hour, to be never separated from her. But still, my beloved, it is very, very seldom that fate allows man to know moments of unmixed happiness. Let us take that which fortune gives us, without clouding our little hour of sunshine with needless fears. If there be not one care, there is always another; and surely the sweet moments that I can pass with you are enough, for me at least, to compensate for all the rest of the dull day. The stars look the brightest, dear one, when the sky is darkest round them; and so may our nights of happiness be all the more delightful for the heaviness of the time while we are parted.”

With such words of tenderness and hope, William Seymour soothed her apprehensions: and as several more days passed without any new cause for fear, Arabella became accustomed to their secret meetings, and looked for the hour of Seymour’s coming with all the joy of expectant love; while he forgot the little incident of his meeting with Overbury, and gave himself up to a feeling of security.

At length, one morning, when he was sitting alone in his father’s house in London, Sir Harry West was ushered in, with an expression of satisfaction in his countenance which spoke him the bearer of good tidings.

“You seem joyful, Sir Harry,” said Seymour; “and I am sure, by your bringing your gladness here, that it has some reference to me. What is it, my good and noble friend?”

“I must not rejoice,” replied Sir Harry West, “at the capture of an unfortunate wretch, whom the bigotry of an unfeeling monarch will certainly doom to the stake, I fear. But Legate is taken; and this searching of the ships suspended. Now follow my advice, William; lose not a moment; but bear your fair lady to another land. Time, the discoverer of all things, will tear away the veil from your connection, make it as thick as you will. Sooner or later it must be avowed; put yourself beyond the reach of tyranny, and then proclaim it openly.”

“I will not lose a day,” replied Seymour; “it will take to-morrow to get everything into a state of pre-

paration again, but surely the next day we can effect our escape."

"In whatever I can assist you, I will most gladly," said Sir Harry West. "I have got a purse at my lodgings, my dear young friend, which I need not, and you do; and if you will undertake to get everything ready in London, and prepare your fair lady, I will go down the river at once, and see that the ship be put in order, well furnished with men, and an ostensible cargo, and ready to sail whenever you join her."

All such matters were easily arranged; and when Seymour entered the boat that night to go down the Thames to Greenwich, it was with the bright hope of carrying Arabella, during the succeeding night, to a place of security, where all apprehensions of separation would be at an end. He reached the landing-place, walked up to the palace, and knocked as usual at Arabella's chamber, without anything causing him to suspect that he was watched.

Ida Mara came to give him admission as usual with a light; but just at that moment somebody came down vehemently from above, and, as if by accident, ran against him dexterously—for it was done on purpose—knocking his hat off, and exposing his face to the light.

The man was a famous sword-player, who had come down from London to Greenwich, to amuse the Prince and the court; and catching Seymour by both arms as if to steady himself, and avoid falling headlong down the narrow staircase, he begged him a thousand pardons, assuring him that he knew not any one was there.

Seymour was upon his guard, however; and after saying in a calm tone that there was no need of apology, he turned, and with an air of indifference told Ida Mara to inform the Lady Arabella that Sir Harry West would have the honour of waiting upon her the next day at noon.

The girl understood his object in an instant, and saying, "Very well, sir, I will tell her," shut the door. Seymour then followed the sword-player down the stairs, and proceeded to call at the lodging of one of the young lords of the court with whom he was acquainted; but after having ascertained the spy had quitted that part of the building, he returned to the apartment of his wife, and was instantly admitted.

In the meanwhile the sword-player hurried on; and passing through various passages and courts, directed his course straight to the lodgings of Sir Thomas Overbury, who was waiting impatiently for his arrival.

"Now," cried the knight; "now, have you discovered him?"

"I have dis—covered him," replied the sword-player, who dabbled in the conceits of the day; "for I knocked his hat off, while a pretty waiting gentlewoman from within held a light."

"And who was it, who was it?" demanded Overbury, with the rapid iteration of impatience.

"It was and is," answered the sword-player, "the second son of a noble Lord, the grandson of a noble Earl. His family is Hertford; his name is William Seymour."

"That is enough, that is enough," cried Overbury; "you can swear that it was he?"

"As surely as I can swear that I am myself," said the sword-player. "But mark ye, most worshipful knight, my evidence will do you little good, for the gentleman did but deliver a simple message, and came away; after which he went to my Lord Ancram's."

"A trick, a trick," exclaimed Sir Thomas Overbury; "stay—tell me. Was it before or after you knocked his hat off, that he gave this message?"

"After, most worshipful," replied his informant.

"A trick, a trick," repeated Overbury. "He was wrapped in a great cloak, was he not?—with a broad slouched hat over his face?"

"To a point," answered the sword-player; "exactly as you have described him to me."

"He comes every night," said Sir Thomas, thoughtfully; "and has been appointed, I think, common courier between London and Greenwich.—I'll to the King at once."

"Excuse me, fair knight," rejoined the sword-player, as his companion was about to quit the room, "but you did promise me ten pieces of gold, commonly called nobles; and my necessities are triumphant."

"There, there they lie, above the chimney," answered the knight. "Now Master Wingfield, void the room; for I must to the King."

The man reached the money from the mantel-piece, and then, with a low bow, passed the door, through which Sir Thomas followed him, locking it behind him. He was disappointed in his purpose, however, for James was busy in the composition of some recondite treatise, and refused to admit him, appointing him, however, to come on the following morning at nine o'clock. The knight shut himself up in his chamber for the rest of the evening; but early the next day he busied himself in collecting further information, and then hurried with it to the King.

James, with whom Lord Rochester's favourite and adviser stood very high at this time, condescended to inform him why he had not received him on the preceding occasion, and even did him the honour of reading to him all that part of the treatise which he had composed the night before. Overbury bore it with the patience of a martyr, and praised and wondered so judiciously that he rose considerably in the King's opinion.

"Now, sir, what is it you want?" asked James; "if it be not a petition, or remonstrance—an account, or a demand, we will hear you graciously."

"It is neither of these things, sire," replied Overbury, "it is only some information which, having accidentally obtained, I feel myself bound, as your Majesty's most dutiful subject, to communicate to you without delay, although it may give your Majesty pain. But as you condescended to explain to me the wise and profound views which you entertain regarding the marriage of your fair cousin, I should hold it little short of treason to be silent;" and he proceeded to relate to James all the facts he had discovered regarding Seymour's nightly visits to Lady Arabella.

The King swore three or four most horrible oaths. "We'll soon stop their love passages," he cried, "the undutiful rebel, the traitor; after the solemn admonition that we gave him, he is no better than Fawkes or Digby; nor is the lassie a whit less blameless. Call one of the secretaries, sir, call one of the secretaries! The Privy Council must be summoned without loss of time."

"It meets at noon, sire, by your Majesty's own order," replied Overbury.

"Ay, truth, so it does," answered the King. "In the meantime have warrants drawn up for apprehending this rebel boy and this headstrong lassie.—Lose not a minute, sir; for by chance they may flee. Away with you, away with you! Let the warrants be brought to ourself for signature."

Sir Thomas Overbury bowed humbly, and withdrew; and the King, rising from his seat, began to perambulate his closet, uttering many a strange oath and exclamation, and walking with that shuffling gait which he always assumed when suffering under any great agitation. To see him, one would have supposed that the news he had just received referred, at least, to the loss of a province, or a rebellion in his kingdom, and not to the love of two persons, who sought nothing but domestic peace.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SIR THOMAS OVERBURY proceeded from the presence of the King, to give those orders which were to make two happy hearts cold, two noble and amiable beings wretched. Perhaps he felt some repugnance to the task, some slight touch of remorse at an act which he could not reconcile to his own conscience; for he had not been so seared and hardened in the fire of worldly pursuits, as to be callous to the reproach of the internal monitor.

Ambition, however, is a Moloch, which requires the sacrifice of the sweetest children of the heart; and he went on to seek Lord Rochester, thinking that he had swept a great obstacle from his path. How little did he know—how little does man ever learn to know—that there is an element always wanting in our calculations, one that we seldom think of, and to which we never give weight enough—the will of God! That which overrules the wise, conquers the mighty, frustrates the persevering, and leaves human schemes and purposes but as bubbles glittering in the sunshine, to break when they have had their hour.

He found Lord Rochester sitting in a rich dressing-gown of brocade, with slippers on his feet, and a small purple cap upon his head, partaking of a rich and luxurious breakfast, at an hour which was then considered very late. Wine was before him; for the reader must remember that those were days when the use of tea or coffee was unknown, and the only difference between the refined man of pleasure and the robust man of labour was, that the one seasoned his meal with wine or mead, the other with ale or beer.

Of the potent contents of the flagon, the King's favourite had partaken once or twice—not so deeply, indeed, as to have any effect upon his understanding, but largely enough to give him a certain feeling of decision and determination, which was in general wanting in his character. There were matters which he had long wished to communicate to Overbury; but in regard to which he had felt that sort of timidity that a lad, lately emancipated from school, experiences in the presence of his old preceptor; and now feeling himself in the mood to open his mind to his friend, he received him with greater willingness and cordiality than he had displayed towards him for some weeks.

“Well, Sir Thomas,” he said, shaking his hand without

rising, "have you had breakfast? Come, sit down and take some."

"I broke my fast three hours ago," replied Overbury; "but I will sit down and talk to you, my good Lord, while you go on with your meal, for I have much to say to you."

"And I, to you, Tom," rejoined the Peer; "I have hardly seen you for this last week, and secrets accumulate, you know. First for your business, however; for yours is always more important than mine;" and he helped himself to another cup of wine.

"Mine is very important indeed," said Overbury; "I wish to speak to you about the Lady Arabella."

"And I to you, too," interrupted Rochester; "that was the very subject in my thoughts; and so perhaps I had better begin at once. As to that marriage, Tom, we must hear no more of it."

Overbury started, and his brow contracted. "You are jesting, Rochester!" he exclaimed. "Not hear any more of it?—Why not?"

"Faith, I am not jesting in the least," replied Lord Rochester; "and as for the why not, I tell you in a few words. I am going to marry another woman; and this confounded English law does not permit polygamy, you know."

"I have heard so," replied Sir Thomas Overbury, mastering his indignation for the time; "but I am no great lawyer. We certainly see a great deal of polygamy, at the court. May I ask who is the fair object whom you intend to make Viscountess Rochester?"

The tone of indifference which he assumed delivered his friend from the fear of opposition, and he replied at once, "My fair Countess of Essex, good knight."

"What, another man's wife!" exclaimed Overbury; "why that is polygamy the wrong way. Nay, Rochester, now you are certainly jesting with me; but I am not to be taken in."

"I am as serious as the dead," answered the favourite; "and let me tell you, Overbury, she is not his wife, and very soon will be so no longer even in name. The marriage is about to be dissolved, and then her hand is mine. We have the consent and aid of Lord Northampton, the fullest approbation and assistance of Lady Suffolk, and her father's acquiescence. I will answer for the King's cordial co-operation. So that the matter is settled and secured."

"Rochester! Rochester!" exclaimed Sir Thomas Overbury, giving way at length to the feelings of his heart: "think, I beseech you; think what you are about!"

"Oh, I have thought very well," replied the Viscount; "so there is no use of saying a word about it, Tom."

"Nay, but you must hear me," said his friend, "and I do entreat you, remember that I do but speak from affection and devotion to yourself. I say again, think, Rochester, what you are doing. Remember, this woman's conduct is the common scandal of the court and the city. Recollect that she is but a———" and he used a word which I dare not write upon this page. "Her uncle and her mother are but panders to her vices; and infamous must he become who dares to wed that woman, who has without excuse broken through every sacred tie, and made herself the impudent gazing-stock of Europe. I say, Rochester, think of the disgrace, think of the shame that will fall upon you, when men point to your wife and tell her history. Remember how an act not half so gross stained and degraded one of the noblest men that lived within these seas—I mean Charles Blount—who raised himself by high and daring actions against the enemy in the field to the Earldom of Devonshire; the conqueror of Tyrone, the pacificator of Ireland—I say recollect the disgrace that fell upon him in consequence of a marriage with the aunt of this very woman's husband, and do not forget that in his case there were excuses that do not exist in yours. That he was the lover of her youth, the man to whom her hand had been promised, before she was compelled against her will to bestow it on another; that she never from the first concealed her love towards him, or promised aught but cold obedience to the man who was forced upon her; and yet, from the hour that he so disgraced himself as to wed Rich's divorced wife, he withered away, with shame, sorrow, and despair, and died in his prime, leaving a blighted name, which, but for that one act, would have lived for ever in renown. Oh, Rochester, consider all this; consider the daily, hourly misery of knowing that your wife is looked on as a harlot, when you might, were you so minded, place yourself upon the topmost pinnacle of fortune, rise to the highest rank that the state admits under royalty, and found a family which might go on, and bear your name with honour to posterity."

"I have considered all," answered Rochester, coldly; "and I am quite determined. As to the marriage with the Lady Arabella, you are deceiving yourself. I heard last night a whisper that she is already married to William Seymour."

"Nonsense!" cried Overbury. "Your open love for this Dame of Essex may have made her show some favour

to another, but to pique you. But as to her marriage, that's some idle report of the poor fools of the ante-chamber. She is not married—she cannot be married."

"Pique me! exclaimed Rochester, with a laugh; "that were vain sport, Overbury; I am cased in proof. However, to marry another man would be carrying the joke somewhat far; and she is married, depend upon it. It is no court gossip; I had it from those who have sharp eyes, and sharper ears. She is married to William Seymour, as sure as my name is Rochester."

"Well, choose some one else, then," cried Sir Thomas; "choose any one but this woman—choose anything but disgrace."

"But I do not see the disgrace," exclaimed Rochester, who had heard him throughout with a heated cheek and contracted brow; "there is a great difference between Lady Rich and Lady Frances Howard, whom they call Lady Essex. I tell you, though some ceremony was performed in their childhood, she is not his wife; and the pretended marriage may be dissolved. Then, too, she has never loved any one but me; she has never pretended to love this man; she abhors, she detests him; she has always told him so. For me she is ready to sacrifice everything——"

"She has sacrificed too much already," answered Overbury. But seeing by Rochester's angry look that he had gone much further than was politic, and that nothing he could say would change his resolution, he added, after a moment's pause, "Well, Rochester, do me justice, and remember that I have but spoken for your good, as I believe it to be. I may be mistaken; probably am; but your happiness I wish sincerely."

"No man's happiness can be secured, but in his own way," replied Rochester.

"True," rejoined Overbury; "but his fortunes may. To those, this sad passion is the greatest bar; and you have yourself owned that, in seeking them, I have always counselled you aright. It shall be my task still, to do the best I can to promote them; and if this be, as I imagine, a false step which you are about to take, nothing shall be wanting on my part to avert all evil consequences."

"I dare say not," replied Rochester, drily; "and now to talk of some more pleasant subject. What does the King propose for the day's amusement?"

"A Privy Council," replied Overbury, forcing himself to speak in a tone of raillery, which was but too evidently assumed; "and after that to commit William Seymour to

the Tower. Perhaps he may burn a heretic in the afternoon by way of fireworks, and end by writing a disquisition for the bishops upon the royal supremacy. You see the bill of fare is various."

"Yes," answered Rochester, "but none of the dishes much to my taste. But, good faith, I must get on my new suit of amber silk, and visit his Majesty before the council."

"Then I will leave you, my good Lord," replied Overbury, "and still beg you to believe that anything I have said this day has been spoken in duty, not in opposition; and so I take my leave."

From the apartments of Rochester he hurried back to his own, and then, having closed the door, he gave himself up to the feelings of anger and indignation which possessed him. He struck his hand upon his brow: he walked vehemently up and down the room; he cursed the folly of Rochester; he upbraided himself for taking any part in the rise of such a man.

"And for this," he cried, "for this I have destroyed the peace, and broken through the happiness, of two good and noble people. To be laughed at, to be made a fool of, to have my best schemes thwarted—all for a base, licentious woman! And this sweet lady on whom I have brought misery—can she be really married to William Seymour? It is not improbable; the very conduct of this man may have driven her on to give her hand clandestinely to another—and I have gone and destroyed them! Would to God I had not been so hasty!" and he sat down and meditated over the act with regret.

But the past—the irremediable past, the only one thing certain to man's limited view, was set as a seal upon the deed, which nothing could tear off; and yet he—as many other men would have done in his circumstances—turned his thoughts to the retrieval of that which could not be retrieved.

"What can be done?" he thought. "It may not yet be too late. If they are prepared to fly, as the King suspected, and as is probably the case, they may have time yet, if they have warning. I can delay the warrants. Then the Council will have to assemble; there will be a long and tiresome harangue of an hour—discussions, perhaps. The wafers is near—the wind fair. She shall have warning at least;" and sitting down, he wrote, in a feigned hand, the following few words to Arabella Seymour.

"Lady, a friend gives you intimation that danger hangs over your head. If you have the means to fly, and have

aught that fears discovery in this court, go at once. You may count upon one hour, but not more."

He folded, sealed it, and hurried through the court towards the apartments of the lady. Within a few steps of the door, he met one of her inferior maids, not Ida Mara, apparently coming from her mistress's room; and recognising her at once, he said, "Take this back to your Lady directly, my good girl. I had it from a gentleman this moment, who said that it was of urgent importance."

The girl took the billet, and saying that she would carry it to Arabella at once, returned towards her mistress's chamber, while Overbury bent his steps to the council-room, where he had left a young clerk making out the warrants.

"Well, are they done?" said the knight.

"One is ready, sir," replied the clerk, "and the other wants but a few words."

Overbury took up the paper which was completed, and read it slowly through.

"Good Heaven!" he exclaimed. "This will never do. Why, it is a warrant against the Lady Arabella as if she were a common felon. Recollect, sir, that she is the King's cousin. It ought to have been a simple summons to appear before the council."

"You said two warrants, Sir Thomas," replied the clerk.

"Well, at all events," exclaimed the knight, sharply, "this will not do;" and he tore the paper, throwing the fragments under the table. "There, leave that, leave that! and make out a summons. The Lady Arabella's case is the most important. Remember you give her her proper style, sir."

"I am sure I do not know what that is," answered the clerk.

"If you look in that book, sir, you will find it," rejoined the knight; "it is not very difficult to discover. You can finish the warrant against Mr. Seymour afterwards; I will return for the summons in half an hour;" and away he went to inform the King that there had been a mistake in drawing out the papers, but that they would be ready shortly.

He found James I. still in a high state of perturbation, which was increased by the tidings that the warrants were not yet ready.

"The de'ils in the clerks!" he exclaimed. "The lazy loons are getting daily more slow, though not more circumspect. Why, the lassie may take wing, and be away

afore the warrants are ready. Go your ways and hasten him, Sir Thomas. You can write a good hand yourself, and need not mind holding a pen at the King's command."

"I shall do so, as in duty bound, sire," replied Overbury, "and I can make out that against Mr. Seymour, while the clerk finishes the one against the Lady Arabella;" and he accordingly retired, mentally resolving that the assistance which he was about to lend should not greatly accelerate the drawing up of the papers.

When he was gone, the King continued for a minute or two to move about in his cabinet, with the sort of irritable activity which has acquired the name of fidgetting. Changing the place of this article and that, pulling the points of his hose, buttoning and unbuttoning his pourpoint, sitting down and then rising up, and displaying many signs and symptoms of that state of ennui in which impatience is blended with listlessness.

At the end of that time, however, there was a gentle tap at the door of the cabinet, and, exclaiming pettishly, "Come in, come in!" the King fixed his eyes upon the entrance, at which immediately appeared the stout, raw-boned person, and broad, but somewhat coarse face, of one of his Scotch attendants.

"Ah, Maxwell!" cried James, "why, where ha'e you been, man? I thought all the world had forgotten their loyalty, and left their King, without respect and decency. Here was Rochester came in and whiffled me a jest, and out again, to put on a ruby he had forgotten. So he said; but methinks it was to other purpose that he went; and no one has been here but Sir Thomas Overbury, who seems to be the only man that thinks his King's service worth attending to."

The querulous tone in which James spoke, indicated a mood ready to receive evil impressions of any one; and as Maxwell was not particularly well inclined, any more than other courtiers, to make favourable reports of his rivals in the King's power, he seized the opportunity to damage the reputation of one who was rising too high over the heads of the minor aspirants to escape jealousy.

"Oh, your Majesty has not a more faithful servant, I am sure, than Sir Thomas Overbury," he said; "he is only a little dull in believing that others will rebel against your will, or thwart your sagacious views. Your Majesty recollects the business about Mr. Seymour and the Lady Arabella."

"Hout tout! Maxwell," cried the King, interrupting

him before he could go further; "you're a jealous beast. But you've missed your fire, my man. Your match has burnt out, and will not light the powder. Why, Overbury has, this very morning, laid open to me all their doings; and is now drawing up the warrants for their arrest."

"The warrants will take a long time drawing, then, your Majesty," replied Maxwell. "If I were a king, or you, sire, a poor Scotch gentleman like myself, I'd bet you a stoup of wine that there will be one mistake or another about drawing up the warrants, till a full hour be lost; and then the messengers may whistle for the lady or her lover."

"Ha, what's that?—what's that?" cried the King. "Why, there has been one mistake already.—You're either a warlock, Maxwell, or you know more about the affair than you tell. Speak plain, man! speak plain! What have you seen?—what have you heard?"

"Why, if your Majesty really wishes to know," replied Maxwell, "and will condescend to promise not to tell my Lord of Rochester, I will relate all that has just happened; and you will soon see how faithful a servant is this Sir Thomas Overbury, who must needs contradict what I told you, sire, of Mr. Seymour and the Lady Arabella meeting in the grounds at Theobalds."

"Speak man, speak!" cried the King, "I'll keep counsel as close as a wilk. You have our commands, sir; so you will be harmless."

"Well, then, sire, just now as I was walking along the cloister——" answered Maxwell.

"Call it the arcade," said the King; "cloister is a popish word."

"Well, sire, as I was walking along the arcade," continued Maxwell, "I saw a maid belonging to the Lady Arabella, carrying a note in her hand. Now, I had just passed good Sir Thomas Overbury; and a fancy struck me I do not know why, that all was not right;—for all the court, you know, say he is playing double with your Majesty. So I asked the girl to let me see the note; and, after much ado, I got her to consent. Well, there, sire, I saw Sir Thomas's own writing, somewhat twisted and turned to disguise it, but clear enough for all that; and, in the inside, was written a warning to the lady to fly from the court with all speed. He engaged she should have an hour clear; and therefore it was I said there would be mistakes enough, and delays enough, before the warrants are ready."

"The false loon," cried the King, "the whelp of a

traitor!—But we'll circumvent him. Run, Maxwell, run! Put a guard at the foot of each staircase that leads from her rooms and the Lady Shrewsbury's.—Fegs! they might have put out the '*bury*,' and left the '*Shrew*.'—Tell the guard to let no one pass out.—Run, man! run!—Speak not, but away!"

Maxwell obeyed the King's command, and hurried out of the cabinet; and James, casting himself into a chair, gave way to a fit of laughter, in the first place, at the thought of having circumvented Overbury. He soon returned, however, to the thought of the knight's offences; and he rolled himself about, with much of that awkward air of indignation which the accounts of African travellers ascribe to the angry hippopotamus.

"The deceitful pagan!" he cried; "the treacherous dog! I'll punish him for forgetting his duty to God's anointed.—But softly, softly! He has too many secrets. We will deal gently with him.—Those cunning Romans, when they were about to punish a great malefactor, took him up to a high place, before they hurled him headlong down, that he might break his neck by the fall; which is a wise and good example to modern kings, who may make such men's ambition the Tarpeian rock, from the highest point of which, they may get a fall when they least look for it."

CHAPTER XXX.

WITH a pale face, and trembling limbs, Arabella entered the apartments of the Countess of Shrewsbury, and, unable to speak, in her alarm she laid Sir Thomas Overbury's note upon a small round table before her, and pointed to it with her finger.

"What is the matter, child?" asked the Countess, taking it up.

The moment she saw the contents, however, she became agitated.

"Good faith!" she cried, "this is wise advice, Arabella, you had better take it. Who brought this note?"

"One of my girls," faltered Arabella.

"Well, well," said Lady Shrewsbury, "a morning's sail upon the Thames will do you no harm; and no one can say you have not a right to amuse yourself with a water-party for an hour or two. Quick, girl; do not tremble,

but get some few clothes together. Let your gentlewoman go down to the stairs with them. You and I will follow; and a barge in two or three hours will carry you to your husband's ship."

"But Seymour—Seymour!" cried Arabella; "I fear more for him than for myself."

"Leave that to me!" answered the Countess. "I will send off a messenger instantly to warn him—You get ready,—quick!"

In a few minutes Lady Shrewsbury joined her niece in her own room. Ida Mara, with one small box in her hand, was already at the door when the Countess entered.

"Where are the two maids, Ida?" asked Lady Shrewsbury.

"In the waiting-room, madam," replied Ida Mara.

"And the door shut?" said the Countess. "Quick, then, go down; and we will follow you in two minutes."

Without reply, the girl quitted the chamber; and Lady Shrewsbury, turning to her niece, kissed her cheek, whispering, "Take courage, take courage, Arabel. I trust all will go well. 'Tis but a little hurry."

The next instant, however, Ida Mara returned, with a pale cheek, and the tears in her eyes.

"There is a guard at the foot of the stairs," she said, "who would not let me pass. He has orders, he told me, to stop every one, and turn them back."

Arabella sank into a seat, and covered her eyes with her hands, while the Countess gazed down steadfastly upon the ground, in deep thought. At length she exclaimed,—

"Call the girl hither, Ida, who came in a few minutes ago."

The fair Italian obeyed at once, and in a moment or two a pretty-looking maid, somewhat vain and coquettish in her dress and appearance, presented herself before the Countess.

"Now, answer me truly, girl," said Lady Shrewsbury. "To whom did you show the note that was given to you a few minutes ago for your mistress?"

The girl's cheek turned crimson, and she was silent.

"Answer me," exclaimed the Countess, sternly; "answer me. Your face betrays you!"

The girl burst into tears. "He took it out of my hand," she said. "I stopped a minute to speak with him; and he took it out of my hand."

"What is his name?" demanded the Countess, in the same tone.

"Maxwell," faltered the girl.

"From whom did you receive the note?" asked the Countess.

"From Sir Thomas Overbury," was the reply.

"Get thee gone, trait'ress," cried Lady Shrewsbury; "get thee gone! and pray to God to pardon thee, for thou hast done much evil. Now, Arabel," she continued, "take off your walking-dress, as I will mine, and let us consider how we must act. You will soon be summoned before the council, be you sure. I will go with you as is befitting. Were I you, I would not deny the marriage; but, if they charge you with it as a crime, be bold, dear girl, refuse to plead before any such tribunal. Say, if you have offended, you have a right to public trial by your country, and boldly declare that the laws of the land do not justify a King in punishing, without the sentence of a jury."

"It will but make him furious," replied Arabella.

As she spoke, the door opened unceremoniously, and a keeper of the council-chamber appeared.

"Madam," he said; but no sooner had he uttered the word, than he broke off, and, turning to some one who was behind him, exclaimed, "You need not go on, the Countess is here."

"Well, sir," said Lady Shrewsbury, "what now?"

"I am sent, madam," replied the keeper, "to summon you and the Lady Arabella to appear before his Majesty in council, which I do by virtue of these presents, under his Majesty's hand."

"Well—on, then! we are quite ready to accompany you," answered the Countess, unmoved. "Come, Arabella, put on something to guard you from the wind, as we have to go all along these courts and passages. His Majesty, I presume, does not intend to make privy councillors of us; if he did, I might give him some good advice. Give me that mantle, Ida. Now, sweet niece, put your arm through mine. You are a timid creature; and it is well that you should have something stronger beside you."

Thus saying, she led the way to the royal apartments, followed by the officers who had been sent to summon them.

In the ante-room of the council-room, however, they were detained; and, at the end of a few minutes, Arabella was called in alone. During nearly half an hour, Lady Shrewsbury remained alone; and when, at the end of that time, the door opened, and Arabella came out, with her fair face deluged in tears, the door-keeper pronounced aloud, "The Countess of Shrewsbury!" That lady, however, paused to speak for a moment to her niece.

"I have acknowledged all," said Arabella, sobbing, "and am ordered back to my own chamber, and thence into custody of some persons to be appointed by the King."

"The Countess of Shrewsbury!" exclaimed the door-keeper again, and, kissing her niece's cheek, Lady Shrewsbury advanced, and presented herself at the end of the council-table.

There was a very full attendance at the board, and every countenance was grave, and even sad, while that of the King was stern and heated. Sitting on one side of his chair, he leaned over to the other, lolling his tongue out of his mouth, as he was much accustomed to do when excited.

"Now, madam," he said; "now, madam, answer my questions. Soul of my body! we shall have nothing but rebellion in the land. Answer my questions, I say."

"Anything that your Majesty asks in reason," replied the Countess, "I am willing to answer."

"Well, then," said the King, "tell me, have you been conniving at the marriage of your niece, a lady of the Blood Royal, with one William Seymour, the second son of a pitiful family?"

"As good as your own, sire," replied Lady Shrewsbury, calmly, "only not quite the head of the house."

"Heard ever man the like of that?" exclaimed the King. "As I am a crowned King, I will commit her to the Tower."

"For telling the truth, sire?" asked Lady Shrewsbury; "that is a new offence; I have not seen the proclamation to that effect."

"Madam, madam," said Lord Salisbury, "be careful what you do. Think what a thing it is to incense his Majesty, who in a moment can commit you, if you show him a contempt."

"If I show any contempt of a legally-appointed court," replied the Countess, "I know in what danger I stand, my Lord; but his Majesty himself told me to answer his questions, and then asked if I had connived at the marriage of my niece with the second son of a pitiful family. I reply, No; the family into which she has married is as good as his own, being descended from a long line of English nobles, and a Princess of that blood, which alone gives him a title to the throne."

"Then you acknowledge conniving at the marriage?" said the Earl, quickly, in order to stop the vehement and probably indecent torrent that was hanging upon the King's lips.

"I acknowledge nothing, sir," replied the Countess. "That my niece may be married to Mr. Seymour, I do not deny; but I am to learn if that be a crime in her."

"We will soon teach you that it is a crime, woman!" exclaimed the King. "Did you, or did you not connive at it, I say?"

"I will decline to answer that question," answered the Countess.

"Take care, Lady," said Lord Ellesmere, the Chancellor. "To refuse, unreasonably, to answer interrogatories of the Privy Council, is a contempt."

"I do not refuse unreasonably, my Lord Chancellor," replied the Countess. "I have strong reasons for not answering."

"Speak them, speak them," said the King; "there can be no just reason for not answering the King in Council."

"I have two reasons," replied the Countess, with a look of scorn; "both of which are good and valid in the English law, whatever they may be in Scotland. First, that being told by his Majesty the marriage of my niece is a crime, I am then asked whether I connived at it. Now the common law of England requires no man to criminate himself."

"Hout, tout," cried the King, "away with her and her common law. How should we ever have got to the bottom of the frightful and diabolical Papist plot, if the prisoners had not criminated themselves?"

"More fools they," replied the Countess of Shrewsbury. "But next I have to say, that I will answer no questions in private. If I am accused of a public crime, I will have a public trial, where my guilt or innocence may appear. There I will answer all questions, and perhaps tell more than those who sit in high places may like to hear. I claim a public trial, I say. I appeal to my country, and claim my privilege as a peeress, to plead my cause before my equals in an open court. I will have no private interrogatories, which are but tricks and entanglements unknown to the law of England."

"Lady, lady," cried one of the Councillors, "you are very rash. It is a well-established principle, that a refusal to answer questions before the Privy Council, touching matters wherein the interest of the state is concerned, is a contempt of the King's prerogative."

"Show me a case," exclaimed the Countess. "You say it is well established—produce an instance where it has been so adjudged; then do with me as you will."

"If there be not a precedent," cried the King, while the

Lord Chancellor spoke to some of the Councillors near him, "if there be not a precedent, it is high time we should make one; and you shall be the first, my bonnie Dame."

"If your Majesty be fond of making precedents," said the Countess, still undismayed, "I hope your successors may be found to reverse them; for the dearest inheritance of an Englishman is the equal protection of the law; and I would lose lands and honours, rather than give up that right to any monarch that ever sat upon a throne."

"It is the opinion, sire, of all the Councillors here present," said Lord Ellesmere, "that to refuse to answer is a distinct contempt of your royal prerogative; and although your Majesty, in your sense of clemency and justice, may be inclined to refer the question to the Judges for their decision, yet in the meantime it is perfectly competent for the Council to commit the lady, for safe custody, to the Tower till such decision be pronounced."

"Will you answer, lady?" asked the King; "once more I ask you, will you answer, that you may not have occasion to accuse our royal mercy?"

"I will not, sir," answered Lady Shrewsbury. "Your Majesty's mercy will stand upon its own foundation, and God grant it has a good one."

"Then commit her," exclaimed James, addressing the Clerk of the Council; "draw out the warrant, sir!"

"And mark, Master Secretary," said Lady Shrewsbury, "let it be put down on the record of this day that I claim my privilege of Peerage, demanding open trial if I be culpable; and that, professing myself willing to answer all lawful questions in a public court, I decline to reply to secret interrogatories, unaided by any counsel or advice. And now God be my defence!"

"Away with her, away with her!" cried the King. "Take her away in safe custody to her own chamber, till the warrant is ready. Let her have time to prepare what is needful, and then send her with a guard to the Tower. We have not often been so bearded in our Council, and 'tis fit that she should be made an example."

"Many such examples would do the court some service," replied the lady; "and with that I humbly take my leave of your Majesty."*

* The Countess was deceived in her expectations; for the Judges confirmed the dictum, that a refusal to answer questions proposed by the Privy Council in affairs of state is a contempt of the King's prerogative. The best authority upon the law of evidence that we possess, Mr. S. M. Phillips, does not even except cases in which the person by

Thus saying, she withdrew, escorted to her own apartment by two of the ushers, who treated her with all respect, but stationed themselves at the door till a formal order for her removal to the Tower arrived.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THERE is something very curious in the great difference of feeling with which we contemplate scenes of sorrow and those of vice. It might be naturally supposed, that in the grief of the good, the wise, and the noble, we should find matter only for sympathy and regret—that pain alone would be elicited in beholding it, and that their anguish would communicate nothing but a share of their suffering to ourselves; while the contempt that we feel for vice, by depriving us of all feeling for the vicious, would leave us sorrowless, though abhorrent of their faults.

Such is not the case, however; and to hear tales of the great and generous touched by the hand of undeserved adversity, excites, as is the case in deep tragedy, a certain degree of strange and almost unaccountable pleasure, even while we grieve for their fate, and take part in their sufferings. It is, perhaps, in some degree, that sympathy is in itself a pleasurable emotion; but I do believe that a great part of that which gives sweetness to the tears which we shed over the history of the afflicted good, is the inherent conviction in the mind of man, that there is a state of being, yet to come, where all shall have its compensation,—where woes undeserved, and unmerited pangs, received with resignation and borne with fortitude, shall be repaid by infinite joy and eternal happiness.

On the contrary, when we gaze upon the progress of the vicious and the criminal, however successful and prosperous in their brief space of action, to contempt and indignation, to disgust and horror, are added the same consciousness of a hereafter, and the certainty of an awful

his answer might criminate himself; although it is remarked, in his notes upon the State Trials, that in such a case the council would, probably, in the present day, allow the general principle of the law to maintain, that no person is compellable to criminate himself, or supply any information which would have that tendency. I need hardly tell the reader that the accounts of this celebrated scene vary in many particulars; but all agree that the Countess refused to answer in private, appealing to a public court.

retribution. Thus, in these instances, all our feelings are dark and sad; there is nothing to alleviate; there is nothing to give light.

Nevertheless we must turn for a short space to the more criminal personages of our tale, and trace them in that rapid down-hill road where vice treads upon the steps of vice, and iniquity upon iniquity, till they are hurried on into the yawning gulf of destruction and despair.

It was in a splendid room, at the princely mansion then called Northampton House, but which has since assumed the name of other possessors, of a purer fame than his who built it, that the Countess of Essex, who had left the court at Greenwich the day before, sat alone with Lord Rochester—her relation, the Earl of Northampton, being then absent. Her face was all smiles and happiness. It seemed as if fortune and success lived in her eyes; and she was laughing gaily, with her weak and criminal lover, over the misfortunes of others more virtuous than herself.

"And so," she said, "he wanted thee to wed this moon-sick girl, and, I dare say, would have made thee a sonneteer to match her."

"Faith, he must have written the sonnets himself, then," answered Rochester; "for, I thank my stars, I never could jingle two rhymes together in my life; and, to say truth, I hate the whole race of these beggarly poets and authors. I have never liked Francis Bacon since he wrote a book."

"I never liked him at all," replied the Countess, "and that would certainly not make me like him more. One never knows how soon one may be put into one of these volumes, which is what makes all great statesmen hold aloof from authors, and keep them down."

"They are not all wise enough to do so," answered Rochester; "but Salisbury himself is beginning to see the folly of giving him any encouragement, though he be such a friend of Sir John Harrington's. I was telling him, the other day, what a fool I thought Bacon for degrading himself by composing that book; and he replied, that it was well to be able to write it, but foolish to write it."

"But poems are even worse than that," said the Countess. "I dare say this friend of thine is a poet, if one knew the truth."

"No, I think not," replied Rochester; "with all his faults, he has not that vice."

"Well, and what did you say to him?" continued the Countess, bringing the conversation back to a subject on which her curiosity was excited—"What did you say when he pressed you so vehemently to this fine alliance?"

"I said I would none of it," answered Rochester; "for the best of all reasons, because I was going to marry you."

"Did you tell him so?" asked the Countess, eagerly.

"Yes, sweet one," replied her lover; "I wished him to know it. 'Tis too fair a fortune, my love, to be concealed."

"Now," cried the Countess, "I will wager this diamond against a flint stone that he strove to dissuade you. Was it not so, Rochester?"

"Yes, good sooth," answered her lover, laughing.

"Ay, but eagerly," said the Countess, — "vehemently?"

"Even so," rejoined Rochester; "but he might have spared his eloquence, my fair Frances; for he moved me no more than a gust of wind."

"Nay, but what did he say?" demanded Lady Essex.

"Oh, that matters not," answered the favourite; "a great deal I have forgotten."

"But I will hear," exclaimed his mistress. "I will never love you more, Rochester, if you do not tell me. Now, do not smile and look deceitful; for I will hear, word for word, all that he said."

"Nay, nay," cried Rochester, "that is hardly fair. What two men will say to one another often bears no repeating."

"The man that cannot confide in me, does not love me," rejoined the Countess, withdrawing her hand, and moving further from him.

"Well, but you know I love you," answered Rochester.

"Then prove it, by telling me what he said," cried the Countess. "If you do not, I shall think you are false and forsworn, and are inclined to follow his counsel and marry some one else.—Yes, yes, I see it very well.—He has succeeded with thee, Rochester, and thou art inclined to seek another bride.—Well, it matters not; I should soon learn to forget the man who would not trust me."

"Nonsense, nonsense, sweet girl!" he replied; "you are jealous without cause. I am all your own—your slave—your captive."

"Then tell me what he said," exclaimed the Countess, suffering a portion of her natural vehemence to appear, even to him.

"But you will be angry," rejoined Rochester. "Why should I tell you what will only pain, grieve, and offend you, and which had no more effect upon me than the idle wind?"

must know, if I am to have peace or rest. I will not be angry; and I will try to be as little grieved as possible; for if I find men speak ill of me, and bark at me with their foul tongue, I will recollect that it is all for Rochester, and that shall be my consolation."

"Well, then," said Rochester, "if you will not be angry, he did oppose my marriage with you in vehement and rough terms;"—and her lover went on weakly to tell her almost all that his friend had said.

He strove to soften it, 'tis true—to put it in general terms, and to conceal the harsh epithets that Overbury had used; but the Countess would hear all, and with instant perception discovered whenever he tried to deceive her in a word. She kept her temper, too, to the end, sometimes urging him playfully, and affecting to laugh at the rude terms which Overbury had used towards her—sometimes pressing him gravely to deal fairly by her, and to speak the truth—sometimes suggesting the words herself in a gay tone, as if she were sure that those were the epithets he had given her, and cared little for them. But when the whole story was told, her fierce indignation burst forth.

"The villain!" she exclaimed—"the base villain! Can you consider this man as your friend, Rochester, after such words as those to your affianced wife? Can you believe that he sought to serve you? Can you suppose that anything but his own interest injured, and his schemes for his own benefit defeated, could have induced him to speak thus of a lady whom you love?—No, no, the man betrays himself!—It is evident that he spoke with the rage of disappointment. It was for his own advancement that he sought to marry you to the Lady Arabella, not for your benefit. If it had been merely out of regard for you, would he have thus abused her who has sacrificed all for you? If he really loved you, would he have thus condemned her love? For whom have I made myself all that he calls me?—for whom have I risked everything, resigned everything? Did I ever give a thought to any other man on earth? With all his hatred and malice, he dare not say that; and had he possessed towards you one particle of true attachment, he would have learned to estimate that, which flings every other consideration but its love away,"—and, bursting into tears, she cast herself, sobbing passionately, upon Rochester's bosom.

He had gazed at her with admiration, not unmixed with wonder, as he beheld her lustrous eyes flashing, and all her beautiful features lighted up with indignation; and when

the shower followed the thunder, he held her tenderly to his heart, and tried to soothe her with words of love and promises of everlasting affection.

"No, Rochester, no!" she cried, at length, raising herself, and wiping away the drops from her cheeks; "it is not for myself I care. Of me he may say what he likes, but he must not deceive and betray you any longer. He seeks but to make a tool of you for his own advancement; and to it he will not fail to sacrifice you as soon as the opportunity occurs. Your fortune and high favour, your noble qualities and distinction, have, as they always do, created many enemies, all eager to pull you down; and, in such circumstances, it needs but a faithless friend to bring about a man's destruction."

"I do not think he would betray me," replied Rochester.

"Not, perhaps, exactly betray you," replied the Countess, "for traitors are always despised even by those they serve; and he is too cunning for that. But, step by step, he will undermine you with the King, if he be not removed. He will first begin by opposing our marriage——"

"If he do that, I will cut his throat," cried Rochester.

"Perhaps he will not do so openly," continued the Countess, "but he will speak of me to James as he has to you, and will beseech him all the time not to betray his words. He will teach the King to think you weak, foolish, and intemperate, because you persevere in loving one who has devoted herself to you. Let this Overbury—let him, if he can, or if he dare, make such sacrifices for you as I have made; and then I will believe he is your friend. As it is, he must be removed.—Yes, if you love me, if you would wed me, if you would be safe yourself, if you would consult my peace, he must be removed."

"Not slain," said Rochester, in a low tone, "not slain—that I cannot consent to."

"Nay," answered the Countess, with one of her bright and beaming smiles again, at seeing that his apprehension of her meaning had so far outrun the reality, that any minor act of vengeance or precaution would seem moderate, "I meant not to slay him. You men are so vehement and violent in all your passions, that the death of your adversary is the only thing you think of. I am not so bloodthirsty, nor do I speak from anger, Rochester. I could pardon him all that he has said of me, did it not show me that he is dangerous to you, and that if he be not removed, his presence near the King will be the

great stumbling-block which will throw down our hopes and wishes. He must be sent to the Tower, or into banishment."

"But there must be some pretext," said Rochester. "He cannot be punished without a cause."

"Oh! fear not," cried the Countess; "a reason will not be wanting. Shrewd must that man be, and virtuous beyond this earth, who, in the courts of kings, can walk so scrupulously as not to give, each day, pretexts for accusation. The wise and the good have fallen beneath the axe, and the best that ever lived was crucified; there is no fear that fair Sir Thomas Overbury has not abundance of such vices in his composition as may well move a monarch's indignation, with a good word to help."

"No," said Rochester, who had been thinking deeply, and was not yet brought fully to that utter shamelessness at which his partner in evil had arrived—"No, a means may be devised for attaining our object, without bringing on my own head the charge of ingratitude. Let us give him the embassy to some foreign court, where he may wear out his days in peace and honour, neither obstructing our views, nor lost altogether to his own."

"But I will not have him sent," exclaimed the Countess, "to some high and honourable mission, which the best nobles of the land might strive for. I will not have him so honoured, that men may say, 'See, what is the reward of calumniating Frances Howard; the man who called her harlot to her promised husband, makes that husband's favour the stepping-stone to his own advancement. Lo! he is ambassador to France, or to the great Spaniards, and goes to carry the tales of her love for Rochester to the gay court of France, or the graver one of Spain.'—Stay, Rochester, you shall send him to Russia! Let him freeze amongst the Muscovites, since his cold blood can never comprehend the fire that burns in ours."

"He will refuse to go," said Rochester; "'tis but another name for banishment."

"Let him refuse!" exclaimed Lady Essex; "and send him to the Tower. The King will be ready enough so to deal with one who rejects his offers.—Nay, Rochester, I will have it so," she continued, in a caressing tone. "You must not refuse me, if you love me. I vow you shall not see me more unless you consent. This shall be the price of our next interview. I might well ask you, as a gallant knight and true, to put that man to death who spoke against your lady's name; but I forbear, you see;

and in this you must obey my behest. Offer him Russia. If he refuses, the offence is to the King, not to you, and leave the King to deal with him. But be sure, unless he be far removed from the English court, he will so machinate as to separate you and me, as he parted those two unhappy lovers."

"It was, in truth, all his doing, I find," answered Rochester. "He never left the affair alone, till he had discovered their marriage; and he then incensed the King against them."

"And they are really married?" said the Countess, in a tenderer tone than she had used; "then they are happy; for though they may be separate, they can yet think that there is that sweet bond between them which no King's word can break.—That is a blessing that nothing can take from them. Do you not hate the man who could step in, and blast their happiness, Rochester?"

"I certainly do not love him for so doing," replied the Viscount, "and thank him but little for mingling my name in the affair."

"As he has done by them, so will he do by you and me," said Lady Essex, in a grave and sad tone, "unless you stop him, Rochester. We stand in his way; our marriage is the obstacle to his ambitious views; he will not cease till he has frustrated our hopes, or ruined us both. There can be no terms with such an enemy; and till I hear that he is gone, I shall never see you without apprehension."

"Well," answered Rochester; "well, it shall be done. I will ask the King for the embassy to Russia on his behalf. I know he aims at much higher things, indeed; and nothing less than a seat in the council, with some high office in the state or household, would satisfy his ambition. But he shall be offered this embassy. If he refuse it, the consequences be on his own head."

"What! then you do see he is ambitious?" cried the Countess. "I wronged my Rochester's good judgment. I thought he had deceived you, and that you did not perceive the tool that he would make of you."

"Oh, I have known his ambition long," replied Rochester, "and was prepared to give it a check in due time. Perhaps as well now as hereafter."

"Better, better far," replied the Countess. "Those who defend a breach, fire on the men who begin to climb the ladder, lest when they are at the top it be too late. Away then, Rochester, away! see that thing done; and, when you can tell me that the embassy is offered him,

you may come back, and shall have smiles for your reward."

After those words they parted, Rochester hurrying to take that new step in the wrong course which was to carry him forward to many others'; and the Countess of Essex remaining to brood over her hatred and vengeance, till she worked herself into regret that she had not exacted more of her weak and guilty paramour.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN the times of our Sovereign Lord, His Sacred Majesty King James I., of happy memory, that peculiar district of the world called Lambeth was in a very different state and condition from that in which it is beheld now-a-days. It was not then a close, thronged, noisy, and somewhat turbulent parish, a borough in itself, sending members to Parliament, and having vast objections to church-rates; but it was actually almost a rural district, with an Archbishop's palace and church, a few houses gathered in the episcopal neighbourhood, and several fine old mansions, with their gardens extending down to the water, occupying the whole bank of the river opposite to Westminster and the Strand. Where now stand patent shot manufactories, and wharfs and warehouses, were then smooth, green, shaven lawns, and tall trees, and wildernesses, and terraces,—and the aspect of the whole place, as far as the different style of architecture and gardening would permit, was much more like Richmond, without its hill, than the famous borough of Lambeth.

One of these houses, at a considerable distance from the archbishop's palace, was remarkable for its beautiful gardens, and for its broad terrace, edging the river, and overhung by tall trees. A flint wall, with a lane on one side, and the grounds of another house on the other, surrounded these gardens and shut them out from the vulgar, leaving them only open to the view of those who passed upon the water, on which side it was not more than three feet high. To the river, there was a private stair for boats to land visitors; defended, however, from intrusion by an iron gate as high as the terrace-wall; and possessing a large bell, which, from time to time, gave notice of applications for admission.

About five o'clock in the evening of a day towards the

end of September, a wherry, rowed by a single man, and containing no freight but himself, glided close under the embankment of the terrace, it being then high water; and there the rower paused for a moment or two on his oars, looking into the grounds above, as if very much admiring their trim propriety. After that short pause he rowed on again, and his inquisitiveness passed unnoticed by any one, as the gardens were vacant.

In about a quarter of an hour, however, the same boat and the same man re-appeared; but this time he did not pause, for there were three persons upon the terrace; a young lady of graceful and noble mien, walking a step in advance; an elderly, stately dame, talking to her at her shoulder; and a fair girl, with large bright eyes, and dark black hair, dressed in the simple, but lady-like apparel, which, in those days of splendid costume, generally denoted the waiting gentlewoman, coming a pace or two behind, with an air of sadness, and her look bent down upon the ground.

The rower, as we have said, pulled on; and about ten minutes after he was gone, the young lady whom we have mentioned turned towards the house, saying, "I shall go in, madam. Dear Ida," she continued, "you can stay if you like; for you have been kept in all the morning, and want air."

"Not if I can help you, dear Lady," replied Ida Mara, "or sing to you, or amuse you. The best air I can have is your own looks, when you are happy."

"That cannot be now," replied the Lady Arabella; "but I am going to write to the King; so that I shall not want you for the next hour."

The girl bent her head, and remained upon the terrace; and the two ladies returned through the trees to the house.

Ida Mara took one or two turns, pausing from time to time to gaze upon the different boats, which, with sails or oars, as the wind favoured them, skimmed fast over the shining surface of the water. In a minute or two, the wherry we have mentioned cut across from the stairs at Westminster, and passed close under the terrace, the man who was in it raising his head as far as possible, and examining the fair Italian with apparently curious eyes.

He went on some hundred yards beyond the garden wall, but then turned, and suffered his boat to drop slowly down, the tide just beginning to ebb, till it came opposite the centre of the gardens, where he stopped, turning the head of the boat to the stream, and, like a trout at the

tail of a ripple, keeping himself from being carried further on by a scarcely perceptible stroke of the oars.

In a minute after, Ida passed the spot in her walk; and the boatman exclaimed, "Hist! hist!"

She started, and looked down upon him; but he was a man of middle age, with his air somewhat grey; and though he was dressed as a common waterman, there was something distinguished in his appearance which belied his apparel.

"What are your wishes, sir?" said Ida Mara, approaching the edge of the terrace.

"Is this Sir Alexander Marchmont's house?" asked the man.

"No," replied Ida Mara; "it is Sir Thomas Parry's."

"Then this is where the Lady Arabella Stuart is confined," rejoined the waterman.

"The Lady Arabella Seymour is here," replied Ida Mara. "Not exactly as a prisoner, though by the King's order."

"You have a foreign accent," said the man; "methinks it sounds like Italian."

"It may well do so," replied the girl; and was about to turn away; but the rower asked immediately, "Is your name Ida Mara?"

She started, and replied, "Yes; who are you?"

"A most unfortunate man," he answered; "but one devoted to your Lady, who has never forgot an act of generosity by which she saved his life. Tell her I have seen her husband in the Tower, that he is well, and as happy as he can be, absent from her. Add that he is under scarce any restraint, can even go out within certain limits; and that I have promised him to bring her a letter from him to-morrow, if she will be here at his hour."

"Stay, stay," said Ida; "I will go tell the lady, if you will wait but a moment."

"Nay, I will return in a quarter of an hour," replied the man. "I may be discovered if I stay too long."

"What name shall I give the Lady Arabella," asked Ida Mara, "in case she should wish to trust you with a billet?"

The man paused and seemed to hesitate, but then replied, "My name is Markham, once Sir Griffin Markham. But tell her I have no schemes or conspiracies on foot. I have done with those things for ever, and only wish to serve her, and show her my gratitude before I die."

In about ten minutes after, Ida Mara was again walking

on the terrace ; and before long, the boat once more shot over from the other side.

"Here is a note," she said ; "here is a note. The lady gives you her best thanks. Will you be back to-morrow?"

"I will," replied the man, bringing his boat as close up to the terrace as he could. "Now, throw it over."

"Ida, with a slight wave of her hand, tossed the note into the wherry ; and Markham then said, "It might be that even if your lady or yourself were here to-morrow when I come, it would be dangerous to throw you the letter. You must give me some sign, if there be any watchful eyes upon you. What shall it be?"

"If there be any risk," replied Ida Mara at once, "you will find me singing. Whenever you find us silent, you may speak in safety."

"Enough, enough !" replied Markham, and rowed away.

Without landing at Westminster, as before, he directed his boat straight towards the Tower Stairs ; and leaving it with the waterman from whom it had been hired, he hurried on through several lanes and turnings, to a small lodging, amongst the manifold alleys by which that part of London was intersected. He there put on a livery coat, with the badge of the House of Seymour upon it, and making a small bundle of three or four books and some writing materials, he once more set out, and approached the Tower.

No opposition was made to his entrance, and he was permitted to proceed to the very foot of the Tower where Seymour was lodged—for we can scarcely call it confined, as, at this period of his imprisonment, the restraint to which he was subjected was very slight. There, however, he met the Deputy of the Lieutenant, who stopped him, asking, "What have you got there?"

"Some books and paper, sir," replied Markham, "for Mr. Seymour."

"Let me see, let me see," said the officer ; and the pretended servant instantly untied the handkerchief, and displayed the contents for inspection.

The Deputy examined each article one by one, and finding nothing to excite suspicion, he said, "You may go on."

When Markham entered the apartments of the prisoner, however, Seymour was not alone. A gentleman in clerical habit was sitting with him, but rose almost immediately to take his leave.

"We may feel for each other, reverend sir," said William Seymour, "though the cause of our imprisonment is so different. It is in both cases most unjust."

"Nay," answered Melvin, the famous Nonconformist minister, with a melancholy smile, "the cause is not so different as it seems." And taking a pen, he wrote upon a slip of paper, which lay upon the table, the following quaint lines:—

' Communis tecum mihi causa est carceris. Ara-
Bella tibi causa est ; ara que sacra mihi. '

Seymour smiled, and shook his hand, saying, "May we both be able to defend the altar that we love!" And bidding him adieu, Melvin left the room.

"Have you seen her?" demanded William Seymour, eagerly grasping Markham's hand, as soon as his companion in captivity was gone.

"I have seen her," replied the other, "but have not been able to speak with her. The woman Parry was with her. I afterwards saw her Italian gentlewoman," he added, marking a look of disappointment that came over Seymour's countenance, "and have brought you comfort, at all events."

Thus saying, he took the note which he had received out of his pocket, and placed it in the prisoner's hands. Seymour read it twice, and pressed his lips upon it eagerly. "This is comfort indeed," he said. "Stay, Markham, I will add a word or two to the letter I have written. How can I ever thank you for what you have done for us?"

"How can I ever thank her," replied Markham, "for having refrained, when a word from her lips would have sent me to the scaffold? My life trembled in the balance! As it was, a grain more would have weighed down the scale."

Seymour did as he proposed, and then handed the letter to his companion. "Stay," he said, thoughtfully; "stay—were it not well for you to tell that good girl, Ida Mara, who is truth and devotion itself, where you are to be found in case of need? The King may not always leave my Arabella where she now is. In his caprices, he may remove her suddenly to some other abode; and if Ida knew where to find you, she might give you such intimations as are most needful."

"I will tell her," answered Markham, "if you think she can be fully trusted.—But remember, Mr. Seymour, my own life is at stake if I am found here. I came but to

collect some small means together, and return to the continent with all speed."

"You must not do for me anything you think rash," replied Seymour; "but, for my own part, the dearest thing I had on earth I would trust to that girl without a fear."

"So be it, then," answered Markham; and the next day, at the hour appointed, he carried the letter to the terrace below Sir Thomas Parry's house.

Arabella and Ida Mara were there alone, and as he approached they were perfectly silent; but he had remarked a boat which followed him all the way up the river, at the distance of some two or three hundred yards; and merely saying, in a voice loud enough for them to hear, "In an hour I will be back," he tossed the letter lightly on the terrace and rowed on.

When he returned, he found the fair Italian there alone; and it being by this time twilight, he paused to hold some conversation with her, informing her where and how she was to find him, in case of need, under his assumed name. On this occasion, as the night before, Ida threw a note for her lady's husband into the boat; and during ten days a constant communication between Seymour and Arabella was kept up by the same means.

At length, one evening, the moment he came near, Ida Mara, who was sitting beside her mistress, on one of the benches with which the terrace was furnished, raised her rich melodious voice and began to sing.

SONG.

"Row on, row on! Another day
May shine with brighter light;
Ply, ply the oars, and pull away,
Thou must not come to-night.

"Clouds are upon the summer sky,
There's thunder on the wind;
Pull on, pull on, and homeward lie;
Nor give one look behind.

"Bear where thou go'st the words of love
Say all that words can say,
Changeless affection's strength to prove;
But speed upon the way.

"Oh! like yon river could I glide,
To where my heart would be,
My bark should soon outsail the tide,
That hurries to the sea.

"But yet a star shines constant still,
Through yonder cloudy sky,
And hopes as bright my bosom fill,
From faith that cannot die !

"Row on, then, row ! God speed thy way !
Thou must not linger here ;
Storms hang about the closing day ;
To-morrow may be clear."

The boat glided on : and that day Markham had no good news to carry back to William Seymour ; for though he rowed more than once past the gardens, neither Arabella nor Ida Mara were on the terrace. When he returned to the Tower, some difficulty was made in admitting him ; and the moment he entered the prisoner's room, when he had obtained permission to see his master, as he called him, Seymour exclaimed, " You have bad tidings, Markham ; I am prepared to hear them."

" I have no tidings at all," was the reply. " The lady and the pretty Italian were both upon the terrace, but they gave me the sign agreed upon, to show that danger was near ; and when I returned there was no one there."

" Something has been discovered," said Seymour, " for I have had my liberty, such as it was, abridged. I am now forbidden to pass the gates. Something has been discovered, depend upon it."

" Perhaps not," answered Markham ; " for, as I rowed down just now, I saw a boat with a guard, evidently conveying a prisoner hither ; and as to the affair at Sir Thomas Parry's house, a thousand accidents might have made them wish me to keep off. His stately old lady herself might be walking in the garden ; there might be some of the King's officers there, or expected ; but I will bid me home with all speed, and if there be anything to communicate, depend upon it I shall either have a message or a visit from Ida Mara. I know not how it is, that girl seems to win the confidence of every one. I saw good Sir Harry West yesterday, as I promised you. He said he had seen and conversed with you, and so would say no more ; but he spoke of that girl as if she were an angel."

" Well he may so speak," replied William Seymour ; " for she nursed him through the plague, at a time when fathers fled from their children, and children abandoned their parents. But I did see Sir Harry ; and the good old knight—though, heaven knows, in former times he tried to dissuade me from what he called my rash love, as if he

could have foreseen all the wretchedness it has produced now—urges me strongly to make my escape with Arabella at any risk, rather than linger here; where, as he truly says, I may be shut up for years,—perhaps for life, like Raleigh or Grey.”

“He is right, too,” said Markham; “and the sooner it is done, depend upon it, the better. You have committed no offence against the law; you are unjustly detained by the mere will of the King; and, if I had been with Sir Harry, I should have joined my voice to his.”

“But I showed him it was impossible even to attempt it,” replied Seymour; “for I had then pledged my word not to go beyond certain limits, and that could not be broken. Now, however, I am free from that bond; for they have taken from me the degree of freedom for which I made the engagement; and, with whatever other fetters they may think to enthrall me, I may yet find means to cast them off when they least expect it. However, my kind and devoted friend, do you return home, and, if possible, see this excellent Italian girl. Let her tell her mistress that, whatever happens, I am determined to attempt an escape. Arabella must hold herself prepared to go with me, or to follow me; and I will beseech all my friends, and you in particular, Markham, to bend every thought and energy to secure her flight. Think not of me, I will take care of myself; and free myself from this tyranny by some means. Watch you over Arabella! I would fain, too, free the Countess of Shrewsbury, who is, I find, imprisoned in the apartments next to those of Raleigh; but they will not suffer me to hold the least communication with her, which I grieve for deeply, as it is by favouring me that she has brought this misfortune on her head.”

“Think of yourself—think of yourself, good friend,” said Markham; “they will not keep the Countess long when you are gone. As for your lady-wife, be sure, that to her safety I will sacrifice my own. She once risked hers for me; and all the life I have is hers, to do with me as she likes. I will ensure that, let them guard her how they will, she shall be safely put on board a ship bound for some foreign country. I am not new to stratagems; and, alas!—though for some years now they have had meaner things to do with than monarchs’ crowns, as formerly,—in seeking a bare subsistence as a banished man, I have been in constant practice, I assure you. Sir Harry West will help me, too; and I think my good Lord Hertford will furnish us with means.”

"That he will," replied Seymour, "to the utmost of his power. But I am not without some wealth myself, Markham; and, as you may be called upon to act more suddenly than you expect, you had better take a part of what I have here. There are two hundred nobles in this bag. Take it, take it. I have more than I shall need; and now away, for I fear every minute, lest Ida should seek you at your lodgings, and find you absent."

Without further delay, Sir Griffin Markham left the prisoner, and hurried on towards his obscure lodging in the lanes not far off. But ere we relate what occurred by the way, we must turn once more to the courtly scenes of the palace, and, as is our custom occasionally, retrograde for a few hours in point of time.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"Now shall you see Sir Thomas Overbury, with pink roses in his shoes, a rapier fit for a Castilian Don, mustachios curling to the moon, and a beard of the most approved cut!" exclaimed Bradshaw, addressing Graham. The barber has been labouring upon him for an hour and a half this morning. Sixteen new pairs of Spanish leather gloves, with pumps of Cordova, and a new velvet jerkin, reached his lodging last night. His ruff has broken the heart of the laundress; and his hose—Heaven help us! saw ever man the like of his hose? One would suppose his nether man a jewel of rare price, to be thrust into such an elaborate casket. I will warrant you, he will trip by upon the tips of his toes, with a 'Give you good den, dear Master Bradshaw! Good den, Master Graham!—the King favours you both—you are likely young men;' and he mimicked the affected tone of some of the superfine courtiers of the day.

"But what is the cause of all this?" asked Graham, who took him literally. "What has happened to him?"

"Oh! sir; he is in the high way to fortune," answered Bradshaw. "As a sconce in a corner of a room reflects suddenly the light of a candle which the housemaid brings in her hand, and another sconce over the chimney catches a gleam from it, so shines the King's favour upon Rochester, and is reflected from Rochester to Overbury; and you may argue from the premises, that they are both

to be lighted up anon, as far as the oil and wick will go ; though, to say sooth, the reel and cruse are both somewhat low in the royal closet. The people must be pinched, sir ; the people must ~~be~~ be pinched. What is the nation but a great gold sponge, to yield its juices under the King's pressure ? However, my mother whips me, and I whip my top ; Rochester smiles upon Overbury, and the King smiles upon Rochester. Did you not see how the favourite took his favourite by the ear just now, led him to the royal door, then thrust him in, so that he well nigh fell at the King's feet, to thank him for his bounties before he knew what they were ?"

" I thought Overbury was somewhat out of favour," replied Graham ; " there was a report of a quarrel between him and Rochester about the Lady Essex ; and don't you remember, when we were at Greenwich, people said, the King suspected him of giving poor Lady Arabella a hint to run away ?"

" Bless your ignorance, Graham !" cried Bradshaw ; " he is a carpenter—a joiner, who saws things in two, and glues them together again with a dexterity quite marvellous. No sooner is a hole made than it is patched up again ; and, for darning on new favours to old ones, he is better than any tailor in the land. Have you not seen how Rochester hangs upon him, and calls him Tom ? and, moreover, the King gave his good lordship five thousand pounds upon a hint from Overbury. No, no ; you will see him a great man soon ; but whether it will be secretary, or lord keeper, or lord mayor, who can tell ?"

While such conversation was going on in the ante-room, the object of it was in the King's closet with James, alone. He had been suddenly called from his own chamber by Rochester, and hurried, without information of what was the matter in hand, into the presence of the King. Rochester then immediately closed the door, and left him there, having previously brought the monarch to the exact pitch he desired.

The description of Overbury's entrance had, indeed, been somewhat caricatured by Bradshaw ; but though he did not exactly fall at the King's feet, he made a profound obeisance ; for James loved the semblance of the most devoted respect, even while he was doing everything in his power to root out the reality from the hearts of his subjects ; and we learn from Sully, that in the early part of his reign, at least, he caused himself, upon all public occasions, to be served at table on the knee.

The King's face was evidently made up for a speech ;

and Sir Thomas Overbury, with his eyes cast down, waited in silence for what was to come next.

"Sir Thomas," said the monarch, after a brief pause, "you are well aware of the high estimation in which we hold your abilities; and we now intend to give you a proof of the confidence which we have both in your honesty and judgment, by placing you in a situation of high trust and confidence, where you may have some matters of great difficulty to handle, and some acts of great importance to perform. In the conduct of these proceedings you will always have to bear in mind your duty to God, which is best displayed in the service of the King. To that, sir, you are bound to sacrifice every other consideration, and to show yourself worthy of heaven and your sovereign, by diligence, devotion, and faithfulness. Upon these three heads of diligence, devotion, and faithfulness, we shall expatiate for a moment." And the King went on to show what he considered to be the duty of a subject employed by a monarch, which certainly left the poor instrument nothing but the state and condition of a slave.

"You are not, sir, to undertake the ruling or governing of any matter without my especial commands," continued James; "that is a part of my craft, to which long experience, as well as the blessing of God, which endows kings with qualities to fit them for the station of his vice-regents on earth, has suited me especially. You may indeed suggest, reverently, anything that may strike your own senses, submitting your opinion wholly to the King for his decision and judgment, and remembering that to do his will, is to do your duty, without doubts, surmisings, and questionings, any further than may be necessary to assure yourself of his purposes."

We need not proceed further with James's harangue; was very similar to many others upon record; but perhaps more strongly than on most occasions, it enforced his claims to passive obedience from his subjects; for which purpose he tortured several texts of Scripture in such a manner as would have justified the purest despotism that ever disgraced the earth. Five times he called himself the Lord's Anointed; and there can be little doubt that, at that moment, his mind hesitated as to which of the two famous monarchs he was, David or Solomon. He inclined, perhaps, to the latter; but yet he had a strong hankering to be David too, only that he knew himself not to be a man of valour, mighty in war.

Sir Thomas Overbury heard him with every appearance of the most profound devotion and respect; and although

he knew that the most pompous speeches did not always precede the most magnificent actions, 'he had little doubt that the least honour the King was about to bestow upon him, was that of raising him to the rank of Privy Councillor. The monarch ended, however, without informing him what was the dignity with which he was to be invested; but, raising a sealed packet from the table, he placed it in his hands, saying,

"There, sir! there! go your way, and meditate upon what we have addressed to you."

Sir Thomas bowed, kissed the King's hand; and expressing his deep sense of James's goodness, though very little divining in what it consisted, retired with the packet.

The knight hurried at once to his own apartment, where he instantly broke the seal, and read. But though the countenance with which he had passed through the ante-room had been as full of buoyant satisfaction as Bradshaw had anticipated, the expression now suddenly changed to one of mortification, disappointment, and rage; and casting the paper violently down upon the floor, he exclaimed—

"Curses upon the traitor! This is his machination. When I have devoted my whole life to serve him, he goes about to ruin me. Russia!—Russia!—Banishment!—Banishment to the furthest part of the earth! cut off from all communication, from all chance or hope of advancement; with no trust to execute, no negotiation to carry on, no opportunity of distinction!—A nation of northern savages. Why not send me to the Cham of Tartary, or to Prester John? Does he think that I will accept such a mission?—Let him go himself, if he likes it; his abilities are well fitted for the task;" and he laughed with bitter and contemptuous merriment.

"Stay, I will write my answer," he continued; and he seated himself at a table; but scarcely had he taken the pen in hand, when one of his servants entered, announcing the Lord Rochester. A spasm of repressed rage passed over Overbury's countenance, but instantly vanished; and he received the favourite with a forced smile.

"Why, what are you about, Tom?" cried Rochester, entering, and casting his well dressed and graceful limbs into a chair. "I expected to find you capering about the room, in joy at some gracious favour bestowed upon you by his Majesty."

"Oh, no!" answered Overbury. "I am a grave and serious man, my Lord; and, as to what I am about, I am writing to his most gracious Majesty, to thank him for the honour conferred upon me, but begging to decline it."

"Decline it?" exclaimed Rochester, with every appearance of surprise and consternation: "pause, and think a moment, Overbury. What, in the name of fortune, can the King have offered, that any of his subjects should dare to decline?"

"Nay, my Lord, you know right well," replied Sir Thomas Overbury, "that this is a thing I cannot accept."

"Really," replied Rochester, "the King has not told me what he was going to offer you."

The reader already knows that this was false; but will not be surprised that in this case, as in all others, one vice brought on a second, or that lying should be consequent upon treachery.

Overbury gazed in his face for a single instant, and then replied, "I am happy to hear it, my good Lord; for the man who counselled this, did no friendly act to him who has ever striven to serve you."

"'Tis most likely the King's own act," replied Rochester. "You know how often he determines on such things himself. But what is it, Overbury? It cannot be so bad as you seem to think."

"As bad as may be, my good Lord," answered the knight; "it is a sentence of banishment—ay, and worse than the banishment of any ordinary criminal. He who conspires against the good of the state, and is yet cunning enough, as so many are, to go within an inch of treason, yet not overstep the iron limit of the law, is exiled, reasonably, to other lands, that his turbulence may no more disturb the peace of England. But the whole world is left him to choose where he will make his refuge. He may suit his whim, his tastes, or his complexion, as best suits him; he may range from the damp pools of Holland and the misty Rhine, to the far boundaries of Italy; may cross the Adriatic or the Hellespont, and become pilgrim to the Sepulchre. He is as free as the air to sweep over the whole world, except this island, and may make himself a country where he pleases. But in my case, I am shackled and tied down; my place of banishment is fixed to the most sickly and unfriendly region of the earth, amongst cold barbarians, unlettered, rough, and fierce; and all for the crime of——"

"Of what?" asked Rochester, seeing him pause.

"Of serving my Lord of Rochester, I suppose," replied Sir Thomas Overbury; "for I know none other to charge myself withal."

"Nay, nay," answered Rochester; "you must be jest-

ing, my good friend. Speak in plain English. Remember, I never could make out a riddle in my life."

"Well, then, the case stands thus," said Overbury:—"His most gracious Majesty, from his particular favour to myself and you, proposes to send me to the court of Russia, as his ambassador in ordinary, there to remain till, in his good pleasure, he recalls me. Now, I foresee that the day, as well as the distance, will be somewhat long. I love not travelling; at least, have had enough to cure me for all fondness for such journeys; and, therefore, am even now sitting down to write to his Majesty, declining the cold honour thus intended for me."

"I fear you will offend the King," said Rochester.

"Better offend the King than destroy myself," replied Sir Thomas Overbury; "but, in a word, I will not go—I love not bears and wolves,—am somewhat chilly in my nature, too,—and, though fur cloaks are comfortable things, I had rather wear them for show than for necessity. Let him turn Muscovite or Turk who will, I will have none of such an embassy. So, if you will permit me, as this requires a speedy decision, I will even finish my letter, that his Majesty may not say I made him wait."

"Well, well, if you are so headstrongly inclined," answered the favourite, "write out the letter, and I will carry it to the King myself, beseeching him to take your refusal in good part."

"Not so, indeed," cried Overbury. "I cannot think of making your Lordship my errand-boy."

"But I must insist on doing it," answered Rochester. "You have done the same for me, ere now; and no one can move the King in the matter with such probable success as myself. Do you doubt me, Overbury?"

"Oh, not at all, my Lord," replied the knight. "I doubt no man, much less one to whom I have been so devoted;" and, seeing that he could not avoid intrusting the letter to his former friend, he proceeded to write an answer to the King.

"Pray, make it humble and submissive," said Rochester.

"As a slave," replied the knight, and wrote on.

When the letter was concluded, he folded it, called for wax, and sealed it with his signet. Then giving it to Rochester, he said, "I really am ashamed of using you as a messenger; but I trust that, in memory of the past, my good Lord,—from many friendly passages between us,—and from my zeal and fidelity in your service,—which might have been somewhat rude, but never wanting,—you will use your best endeavours to obtain for me his

Majesty's permission to decline the honour he intended me."

"I will do the best I can," answered Rochester; "but you must not attribute the bad success to me, if I fail. I fear, at best, you will greatly injure yourself; but that is not my fault;" and away he went, saying to himself, as he walked along the passages of the palace, "That man must be disposed of somehow. He suspects me, and will find some opportunity for revenge. I cannot trust him longer, and yet I would not injure him, if I could help it. His own unruliness will be his ruin."

In the meantime, Overbury sat with his head leaning upon his hand, in meditation bitter enough.

"He goes to complete his treachery," he thought. "On my life, this feeble-minded favourite is as base as shrewder men. 'Tis safer by far to serve a sensible villain than a weak fool. One is sure of the former, so long as his interest goes with ours: there is no security with a creature like that. He will ruin himself; so 'tis no wonder that he begins by ruining others."

With such reflections, the knight remained for about twenty minutes; at the end of which time Lord Rochester returned, with a grave face, accompanied by Sir Charles Blount. Overbury received them with politeness somewhat too ceremonious; but Rochester immediately said, "I have made no way with your petition—the King insists upon obedience."

"He shall not have it!" exclaimed Overbury, hastily. "I have yet to learn that an Englishman can be banished from the land, at a King's will, without any crime committed. I will not go, my Lord; and methinks, in his high favour, my Lord of Rochester, if right willing, might have obtained a higher grace of the Sovereign than merely that his poor friend should have leave to remain in his native land, rather than to carry his bones to Russia but to leave them there."

"You do me wrong, sir," replied Rochester. "I have brought Sir Charles Blount with me, who was present all the time, to inform you that I urged his Majesty, as much as was decent, to grant your request."

"He did, in truth, Sir Thomas," said Blount.

"Then he has fallen, indeed!" cried Overbury. "I have known the time, Sir Charles, when, if this noble gentleman had asked the King to give him half a province, he would have had it, in land or money."

"That is a different thing," said Sir Charles Blount, drily, "from asking a monarch to permit his subjects to

disobey him. I doubt not his Majesty would rather give half his kingdom, than bate a jot of his prerogative."

Rochester had sat, while these few words were exchanged, with his eyes fixed upon the ground; but at length raising them, he said, in an earnest tone, "I do beseech you, Overbury, for your own sake, obey the King; and be assured that I will do my best to shorten the period of your absence, and to obtain your recall as speedily as may be."

This time he was sincere; for his heart somewhat smote him, and a dread of the reproach of men, when it should be known that he had dealt with such ingratitude to one by whose counsels and assistance he had prospered, affected him not a little.

There is something that all great men feel, and even meaner persons too, when raised to high station by accident or fortune, in the stamp which history is to affix upon their name, which overawes many a bad action rising up in their heart, and gives energy and vigour to nobler purposes. Vague it is, and undefined, like all remote objects, like fate—like death—like the judgment after death; but still it casts its shadows over the present, and quells the dazzling brilliancy of pettier objects near.

Weak and short-sighted as he was, Rochester experienced its influence at that moment. To be branded with the stain of foul ingratitude for coming times—to be marked out in the annals of the age as one who had betrayed and ruined his friend—to be held up for scorn and reprobation as a base and thankless villain, in the eyes of his children and his children's children, somewhat appalled him; and he wished that he had not taken the first step in a course so full of shame.

But Overbury answered fiercely, with indignation and disappointment, and the rage of a strong ambitious spirit mastering common prudence.

"It is vain—it is vain!" he said. "I am a freeborn Englishman! I will not go! Let him make me if he can!"

"These words are unpleasant," cried Sir Charles Blount. "Sir Thomas, I will take my leave. My Lord of Rochester, I must go."

"And so must I," rejoined Rochester. "It is useless to argue longer with him."

"Good-bye, gentlemen both," said Overbury. "Rochester," he added, in a meaning tone, "Rochester—take care!"

The favourite turned, and looked at him with a glance

of anger and contempt; and saying, in a low voice, "I will!" he quitted the room.

In about half an hour—it could not be more—a royal barge, containing a gentleman, with his arms folded on his chest, his head bent down, and his brow frowning, together with a small party of the guard, and a messenger, was seen upon the Thames, close to the stairs; and as the waterman pushed off towards the middle of the stream, the officer in command said aloud, "To the Tower!"

The gentleman which that boat conveyed to the gloomy abode of captivity and sorrow was Sir Thomas Overbury!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WE must now return to pursue the homeward course of Sir Griffin Markham, as he proceeded from the Tower of London to his little lodgings, in one of the streets at the back of Petty Wales.

When he had walked about two-thirds of the way, he perceived a female figure hurrying on before him, with a man carrying sword and buckler a step behind him. She was wrapped in a large cloak; but there was something about her light figure and easy walk which made Markham instantly suppose that she was *Ida Mara*, and on passing by and looking at her face, he saw that the supposition was correct.

He instantly stopped to speak to her; but the girl, who recognised him, notwithstanding his change of dress, made him a sign to forbear and go forward; and at the same moment, the servant with buckler and broadsword told him in a sharp tone to walk on, and not stare into the gentlewoman's face.

At length, at the shop of a silk merchant in a small way, *Ida Mara* paused, while Markham hurried on to his own lodging. After a few inquiries, and the purchase of some insignificant articles, *Ida Mara* herself proceeded on her way, telling the man who accompanied her, to wait where he was till her return, or till she called him*. She was soon in the entrance of Markham's lodging, the door of the passage standing open; but just as she had passed the threshold, a hand was laid upon her arm, and a voice exclaimed, in a tone of surprise, "*Ida!*"

The fair Italian instantly turned round, and beheld Sir Harry West.

"In the name of fortune, my dear child, what are you doing here?" and, perhaps, in the circumstances of those depraved times, the good old knight might have suspected any other of the attendants of the court of imprudent, if not criminal purposes, in coming thus, with some degree of disguise, to such a part of the City.

But Ida Mara was not to be suspected; and, if a shade of doubt or apprehension had crossed Sir Harry's mind, which it did not, the beaming satisfaction which lighted up her face the moment she saw him, would have dispelled it at once.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you, Sir Harry!" she cried; "I was coming to seek you after I had been here. I have much to tell you; and if you will wait one moment, I will be down directly."

"But where are you going to, my dear child?" asked the old knight. "Are you aware that this is not the most reputable part of London?"

"I did not know it," answered the girl, simply; "but at all events I must go; for it is about our dear Lady's business, and I am to see a person called Grey."

"I am going to visit the same man," replied Sir Harry, "so I will go with you, if you have not any private conversation for his ear, my fair Ida."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the girl; "you may hear it all; for I have just the same tidings to carry to you; and perhaps it may be better that you should hear them together, for then you may devise some means of remedying the new disasters which have befallen us."

"Stay a minute, Ida," said Sir Harry, seeing her about to mount the stairs; "do you know the man you are about to visit? Do you really know who he is?"

"He has carried several letters," replied Ida Mara, dropping her voice, "from my Lady to her husband, and from him to her. I know, too," she added, in a still lower tone, "that his name is not Grey."

"That is enough—that is enough!" said Sir Harry. "Go on, my dear."

The girl then ascended the steps, and knocked at a door on the first landing. Markham instantly opened it himself and admitted them—somewhat surprised, indeed, to see Sir Harry with the fair Italian—into a small, low-roofed chamber, scantily furnished, but strewn in all parts with various anomalous pieces of dress, from those of a high-bred cavalier, to those of an inferior artizan. Swords,

daggers, one or two curious articles of *virtù*, ten or fifteen volumes of books in rich old bindings, two masks, a pair of fencing foils, and the head-piece and breast-plate of a horse-arquebusier, gave it the air of a second-hand warehouse, and left scarcely a chair vacant for the knight and his beautiful companion to rest themselves upon.

"I am glad you are come," cried Markham, addressing Ida Mara, after a few words exchanged with Sir Harry West; "they have straitened Mr. Seymour's captivity; and I fear something has gone wrong at your house, too. What is your news, sweet Mistress Ida? Bad, I fear?"

"As bad as it can be," answered Ida Mara: "they have discovered that letters are given and received; an angry message has been sent by the King to my Lady; and to-morrow morning she is to be removed to Highgate, to the house of one Mr. Conyers, there to remain till a lodging is prepared for her at a place called Durham."

"Durham!" exclaimed Markham; "that is destruction indeed. She must not go to Durham, if we can prevent it, Sir Harry."

"How is that to be done?" demanded Sir Harry West.

"Faith, if need be," replied Markham, "she must feign illness."

"There is no need of feigning," answered Ida Mara, in a sad tone; "for, from the moment she heard that news, she drooped her head like a gathered flower, and if they bear her to Highgate, it will be all that they can do."

"Give me three days, and I will undertake for her escape," exclaimed Markham. "I am wiser now than I was some years ago, Sir Harry; and know how to make use of my time. Will you aid me, noble sir?"

"With my heart, hand, and means," said Sir Harry West; "for this cruel tyranny of the King, towards so sweet and unoffending a lady, justifies what would be otherwise unjustifiable, to thwart him. What is to be done, my good friend?"

"Much," answered Markham, "very much; and we must divide the labour. I dare not show myself amongst the great of the land; so you, Sir Harry, must see Lord Beauchamp, and the Earls of Hertford and Shrewsbury; they must furnish us with men, horses, and money. Let them collect as many servants and beasts as they can round about Highgate, suffering no three of the knaves to know where the others are, but with orders to obey you or me implicitly. I will provide the ship and the disguises; and if we can but delay her journey till such a time as suspicion

and vigilance be somewhat laid asleep, we are all safe. Tell me, Mistress Ida, is there any man about the lady who may be trusted? How many servants has she allowed her?"

"Three men," replied Ida; "but the only one to be trusted is Cobham, who has been with her long. He is prudent, and would sacrifice his life for her, I am sure."

"Then you must let him into our secret," said Markham; "first speaking with the lady, and asking her consent. You must tell her, too, to be prepared at any moment to put our scheme into execution; let nothing take her by surprise; and, above all, give her some hint that it may be needful she should put on man's attire. If I know her rightly, that will be the greatest stumbling-block."

"It will not please her," answered Ida Mara; "but still, for her own sake and her husband's, I am sure she will consent."

"Were it not better," asked Sir Harry, "that the one escaped first, and the other followed?"

"No, no," replied Markham; "I have thought of that; but I am very sure, that the duration of the other would be rendered ten times as severe, the moment one was gone. Let them both go together, Sir Harry, then there is but one risk for all."

"But there is a difficulty," said Sir Harry West, "which you have not foreseen, good sir. Mr. Seymour has pledged himself not go beyond——"

"That is at an end," exclaimed Markham; "they have taken from him the limits they allowed; and, consequently, he is freed from his promise. He is willing enough now to escape, and, moreover, feels sure of effecting it with little, if any, need of help: we shall but have to let him know where the ship lies, and he will undertake the rest. I will see you to-morrow at Highgate, lady fair, and tell you more when all is arranged. Now, hie you home; for it is growing dark, and you are too pretty a flower to bear the night air."

"I will go with you, Ida," said the old knight.

"I have one of the men with me," answered Ida Mara; "and have but to go down to the water-side. Have I anything else to tell the lady?"

"Nothing at present," replied Markham; "to-morrow I will visit you, as I have said, in some shape or other; and if you should have occasion to write, let it be in your native tongue; I shall understand you. We will see you safe, till you have rejoined your companion. Go on, and we will follow."

Thus saying, he opened the door of his room; and Ida

Mara, descending the stairs, with a quick pace, walked on to the spot where Arabella's servant stood, near the shop at which she had left him; Sir Harry West and Markham keeping at the distance of a step or two behind. The old knight, however, was not satisfied, even when he saw her under the protection of a single attendant; and still, accompanied by Markham, continued to follow her.

At the end of the second street he had occasion to be glad that he did so, for by the small portion of light that was remaining, he saw a very extravagantly dressed personage, with black hair and beard, take hold of Ida Mara by the arm, while a stout man, who was with him, thrust himself in between her and her attendant, seemingly inclined to pick a quarrel with the latter.

"Ah! my dear; have I found you at last?" cried the man with the black beard.

"What, in Satan's name are you running over me for?" said his companion, taking Arabella's servant by the throat.

"I will soon show you," answered the man, drawing his sword; while Ida Mara struggled to disengage herself from the grasp of the other, who only laughed, and exclaimed, "Ah! you cannot get away now!"

But just at that moment, Markham ran up to take part with Arabella's servant, and Sir Harry West, who was still a powerful man for his time of life, seized the fellow by the collar, who had got hold of his fair protégée, and by one pull, with a kick against the bend of the knee behind, laid him upon his back on the pavement. The man hallooed piteously; but the knight merely spurned him with his foot, saying, "Get up, impostor, and be gone. I know thee."

It is probable that the old knight would not have suffered him to escape without further chastisement, had he not been afraid of bringing a crowd about the party, which might have proved inconvenient; and worthy Doctor Foreman, for he it was who had been thus overthrown, scrambled upon his feet again, showing but little inclination to bluster.

"Come away, come away," he cried to the man who was with him, and then took two or three steps towards the corner of another street. Before he reached it, however, he turned, and exclaimed, with a significant gesture of the hand, "I will have my day!"

"To be hanged," replied Sir Harry West; and seeing that the other man was beating his retreat also, the old knight took Ida Mara by the arm, saying, "Come, my dear, I will see you safe to the boat." He accordingly led

her on to the water-side, and did not leave her till she was safely embarked upon the Thames. Sir Harry then returned with Markham to his lodging, more completely to define their plan of operations, and to commence the carrying of them into effect at once.

In the meanwhile, Ida Mara returned to the house of Sir Thomas Parry, from which her absence had passed unobserved, and bore with her some hope of consolation to poor Arabella, who had given herself up to despair at the prospect of being removed to such a distance from her husband. She still remained so ill and weak, however, that the worthy knight who held her in his custody, judged it expedient to intimate to the King, that it would be dangerous to force a long journey upon her in her situation at the time.

The reply of the King was as cold and unfeeling as might be. He believed she was feigning, he said; but that, at all events, she must be removed to Highgate, where his physician should visit her.

Accordingly, on the following morning, she was placed in a litter, and carried to a house pleasantly situated at a short distance from the village, where she was received with much kindness by the master and mistress of the mansion. Two of the King's physicians were already in waiting, and Mr. Conyers, into whose charge she was now given, in energetic language, pointed out to them the absolute necessity of allowing the lady time to recover, before it was attempted to remove her further.

"If you suffer her, gentlemen," he said, "to undertake a journey in her present state, and before she has completely regained her health, her death be upon your heads; for you must see that she is totally incapable of supporting it."

The physicians agreed to the justice of his remarks, and drew up their report accordingly; assuring her, that she should be suffered to remain for a week, at least, where she then was. As soon as they were gone, Arabella thanked her host gently and sweetly for the kindness he had shown her.

"Nay, dear lady," he answered, kissing her hand; "I and my good wife are interested in the matter, for we shall thus retain you longer with us; and we propose to ourselves the pleasure of comforting and soothing you, which we do not estimate as a slight grace. For a few days, perhaps, we shall be obliged to have the appearance of strict gaolers; but, as we are not such by nature, we shall, I doubt not, obtain permission to relax, especially if

you would, when visited by any of the King's officers, assume the appearance of being somewhat reconciled to your situation, and submissive to the will of the King."

The brutal and ungentlemanly reply of James, when the physicians made their report, is well known; but they adhered honestly to their remonstrance against any attempt to remove the lady to Durham for some time; and when, on the following day, one of them visited her, he brought her the glad tidings, that she was to remain at Highgate for a month.

We must notice, however, before we proceed, an event which took place on the day of Arabella's arrival at the house of Mr. Conyers.

After the hint which had been given by Markham, it may easily be supposed Ida Mara was frequently on the watch during the day for his promised visit; but the situation of the mansion, which was one surrounded on all sides by extensive grounds, enclosed within high brick walls, rendered any communication with those without extremely difficult. At length, however, towards evening, she perceived, from the window of her mistress's chamber, a man bearing a bundle on his shoulder. He was apparently a porter, and seemed considerably advanced in life, walking with slow steps, and bending under his load. When half way along the gravel walk, which ran from the gates to the house, he paused, laid down the packet, and wiped his brow.

"Lady, lady!" cried Ida Mara, addressing her mistress, who was lying down to take some repose, "here is somebody coming whom I think I know—I will run down and meet him."

"Be careful, be careful, Ida!" said Arabella; "if they were to discover you, and drive you from me, what should I do?"

"Something must be risked, dear lady," answered her attendant. "I am sure that is our friend." And away she went, with a light step, down the stairs, and out by a side door. Knowing that she might be seen from the windows, she walked slowly and deliberately along the path, till she reached the spot where Markham stood with his bundle.

"What news?" she said, pausing beside him.

"All is going on right," he replied; "a ship is hired, and will be ready in a few days. 'Tis a French vessel taking in a cargo, and may be known by the flag. It will be at Leigh; but, in the meantime, let the lady know that

friends, with horses ready for her service, are always to be found at a small inn, called the 'Rose,' on the road from this place to Newington."

"What have you got there?" asked Ida Mara.

"Some woman's apparel at the top," answered Markham, "sent by the Countess of Hertford: but, underneath, there is a disguise for the lady, in case of need."

"Will they not open it at the house?" inquired Ida.

"No, no!" replied Markham; "the man's dress is so folded up that they cannot see it, without cutting open the cloth it is wrapped in. But here comes somebody from the house; have you any tidings to give me?"

"Not as yet," rejoined the pretty Italian, in haste; "when I have, I will send it to the Rose."

"That will do, that will do," replied Markham. "Now, remember, I have asked you if the Lady Arabella is here. That I have come with these things from Sir Thomas Parry's, where they have been left by mistake. You may pay me something for my labour if you will, for I am to be a porter, you know."

"How much do you charge?" asked Ida Mara, with a smile, taking out her purse.

"Not less than half-a-crown, Madam," answered her companion, as Mr. Conyers approached; "remember, it is a long way."

"Oh, that is so much," said Ida, "for carrying such a package as this is very light;" and she lifted it with her hand.

"Not so light, to bring seven miles, mistress," rejoined Markham, acting his part with skill, acquired by long practice. "Ask this gentleman if I charge too much."

"What is the matter?" demanded Mr. Conyers, coming up.

"He asks half-a-crown, sir," said Ida Mara, turning round, "for carrying this parcel hither from Lambeth, where it was forgotten this morning."

"You had better give it him," replied Mr. Conyers, smiling; "it is a long way."

The fair Italian put the half-crown into Markham's hand, saying, "Well, take it up to the house, then. I will come after you, and carry it up to the lady's room."

"Stay a moment," said Mr. Conyers, as she was about to follow the seeming porter, who took up the package and walked on; "a word with you, pretty one. Remember, when you wish to speak with any of your friends, it

must be outside the wall. I have no orders to keep you within—but nobody except persons to myself must for the future, pass the gates."

His tone, though not unkind, was grave and significant; and Ida Mara, thinking it better to make no reply, merely bowed her head and withdrew, following her confederate quickly, and taking his burden from him at the door.

She watched him as he returned towards the gates, to which the master of the mansion had bent his steps after leaving her, and from which he was now coming back. Mr. Conyers, however, passed the pretended porter without stopping, and Ida Mara hurried with the packet up to her mistress's chamber. As soon as she was there, she opened it, and, from the bottom, drew forth a bundle sewed up in a linen cloth, which she instantly deposited in a closet, and locked the door.

"What have you there, Ida?" asked Arabella.

"A disguise for you, dear lady," replied the faithful girl, in a whisper, approaching close to her mistress's bedside. "I know not what it is, but we will not open it to-night."

She had scarcely done speaking, when an elderly woman, an attendant of Mrs. Conyers, tapped at the door and entered, asking if she could be of any assistance.

"Yes, Mrs. Maude," replied Ida, "if you will help me to lay out these things, which seem to have been somewhat tumbled in coming, I will thank you;" and, aided by the maid, she took all the articles of apparel sent by Lady Hertford out of the package, one by one, spreading them forth with great care, though Arabella, who had never employed her in any menial capacity since her act of devotion in nursing Sir Harry West through the plague, told her it would be better for her to send for the maid, Helen, to perform that office.

The servant of Mrs. Conyers, however, was for the time completely deceived; and, on retiring, informed her mistress, who had sent her to the lady's chamber, that there was nothing in the package which she had seen brought to the house but ordinary clothing.

Good Mrs. Conyers was not a harsh or unkind personage, but she was one who possessed few very gentle feelings; and those that she did possess were so well sheltered by a considerable share of selfishness, that it was somewhat difficult to get at them. She was of a prying disposition, too; but it fortunately happened that, as is frequently the case with persons of her character, the mind was as obtuse as the feelings; and with every inclination to act the gaoler

and the spy upon the fair prisoner, she had not the wit to execute the task effectually.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"ALL as we could wish, all as we could wish!" cried Rochester, entering a room in Northampton House, in which the Countess of Essex sat with her mother, Lady Suffolk. "We have the great majority of the judges, delegates. In a few days the decree of nullity will be pronounced, and we need not care a pin for that rank puritan, Abbott, or the Bishop of London. They are the only two who hold out, for Ely and Coventry have yielded to the King's arguments."

Lady Essex cast herself into his arms, with her face radiant with joy; and the shameless Countess of Suffolk rose and congratulated the lover of her criminal daughter, with as many expressions of satisfaction as if he were about to raise her to a station of honour and fame.

"Get them to sign the decree quickly, Rochester," she said; "Abbott is a powerful man, and the see of Canterbury has no light authority. He may bring some of the rest over again; and it is as well to have as many on our side as possible."

"There is no fear, there is no fear," replied Rochester. "They have pledged themselves to the King, and cannot go back. Nevertheless, be you assured, dear lady, I will lose no time. What I most fear is from that villain, Overbury. He has written me this day a most insolent and threatening letter; and he may make mischief."

"I wonder," said Lady Suffolk, in a jesting tone, "if there be no butts of Malinsey now in that same Tower of London? But come, I will go and tell Northampton of your good news. He is as eager in the business as any of us."

"Not as I am," answered Rochester, casting himself into a seat by the side of his paramour. "There I defy him."

"But what says your dear good friend, Sir Thomas Overbury?" asked Lady Essex. "My mother is right, Rochester: we want Malmsey butt!"

"It were not safe," answered her lover, looking down; "the ~~may~~ may drive me to punish him as he deserves;

"Oh, by a thousand means," answered the Countess. "But what does he say, what does he say, Robert? let me see. Have you got the letter with you?"

"Yes, here it is," answered Rochester; "a sweet composition, in truth, and one which shows that he and I are henceforth sworn enemies. One or the other must perish, that is clear."

"Let it be him, sweet Rochester, let it be him," said the Countess, taking the letter, and running her eye over the contents.

"What says the villain?" she exclaimed, at length, with her face burning as she read aloud some portions of Overbury's letter, "'—You and I will come to public trial before all the friends I have!—They shall know what words have passed betwixt us heretofore!—I have wrote the story betwixt you and me from the first hour to this day!'—Rochester, there is no time to be lost! He brings it on his own head.—Let him take the consequences."

"But how? but how?" cried Rochester.

"How?" asked the Countess. "Is he not in the Tower?—Is not my father Lord High Chamberlain?—Are you not a Privy Councillor?—Will the King refuse you anything you ask in reason?—Rochester, Rochester! means are not difficult if you will be firm. But place a secure man as Lieutenant of the Tower, and leave the rest to me. What—would you have yourself overthrown by a worm—by a viper?—Will you leave a snake to sting you, when, by one stroke of your heel, you can tread it into nothing? You have done all you have done, more than could be expected, to avoid the necessity he forces on you. You offered him rank, station, and high employment! He refused them all, and his own obstinacy sent him to the Tower. Now he would charge and calumniate you, knowing right well, that slander always leaves part of its venom behind, whatever antidote we apply. He gives you no choice, he forces you to declare that he or you must perish."

"It is but too true," replied Rochester, gazing on the ground somewhat gloomily; "and yet I would to Heaven he did not force me to deal with him harshly."

"Ay, but he does," exclaimed the Countess. "Tell me, if two men are in a sinking boat that will but bear one, has not the strongest every right to cast the other into the sea, and save himself?"

She paused for an answer, and her lover replied, "I think he has; but still he may regret to do it."

"True," said Lady Essex, "true; and so do I, and so

do you. But if that man were an enemy, who had brought him there only to take his life? He who weakly stands in fear of a man he can destroy, deserves the fate that he spares the other. Had he been content to bear, even for some short time, with meekness and forbearance, the punishment he has called down on his own head, he might have lived on in peace, for aught you would have said or I have done against him. But now, Rochester," she added, laying her fair and beautiful hand upon his arm, and speaking in a low but emphatic tone, "but now, he must die! Do you mark me?—He must die! It is not hate that makes me speak; we could have afforded to hate him, and yet let him live. I practise nought against the life of Essex, though Heaven knows I have hated him enough. But to dread is different—to live in continual fear of what a fellow-being may say—to know that our secrets are at the mercy of an enemy—to see him strive to curb us at his will, like a groom upon a managed horse, because he has got the bridle of fear between our jaws, is not an existence to be tolerated for an hour. Fling me, I say, such a rider to the dust and break his neck, or you are not half a man. This letter, this base and insolent letter, is his death-warrant!" And she struck it with the back of her fingers, with all the passion and vehemence of her nature. "He has signed it with his own hand," she added. "It is his own deed! and as he has planted the tree, so let him eat the fruit."

"But the means! but the means!" cried Rochester. "Where shall we find the means?—Remember, such deeds leave marks behind them that may condemn us. Cold judges will not weigh the provocation, but only the act; will not think of how he drove us to destroy him, but punish us for his destruction. The King himself will suffer no private revenge; remember the case of Sanquhar, where no prayers or entreaties would move him."

"Ay, but remember, also," said the Countess, "that he was hated—you are loved. James smiled when he signed Sanquhar's warrant. Know you not why he looked so pleased? Was not Sanquhar a friend of that famous King of France, who so eclipsed the pale light of the Scottish Star, that he looked like Orion beside one of the little twinkling Pleiades? Did not Sanquhar stand by, unmoved by aught but laughter, when Henry vented a keen jest upon the birth of this British Solomon; and James paid him well. Him he detested; you he adores.—Who does not that knows you, Rochester?—And if this be so managed that no mighty hubbub is made about it, I will undertake the King shall aid you to conceal it, rather than punish you.

for an act most necessary. Besides, if I judge right, there may be things within the scope of your knowledge that this great monarch would not have told. I counsel you not to make him dread you; for that is too perilous. Show him all devotion, and there is no fear of his becoming an enemy to one who is so much his friend. Then, as for the rest, lend me your power, and I will give you the means. I will away, with all speed, to a certain serviceable woman whom I know, who will afford me good counsel as to what is to be done. But I must put off this gay apparel; and if you will be here to supper, I will have news for you. Hark! I hear my mother coming, with my good Lord Northampton. He shall lend me his barge; and I will away."

"Let me go with you," said Rochester.

"What, in these fine feathers?" cried the Countess, laughing as lightly as if her errand were but some pleasant scheme of momentary diversion. "No, no, most noble Lord, that would betray all. Another time you shall. Fair sir," she continued, turning to the Earl of Northampton, as he entered, "I beseech you, as your poor kinswoman and dependant, to lend me your Lordship's barge for a short time. I have a secret expedition to the city, to visit a certain goldsmith, who must not know me, lest he charge his workmanship too dear. You will not deny me?"

She spoke in a gay and mocking tone, calculated to discover rather than to conceal the fact, that she had some more important scheme to execute than that which she gave out; and the Earl of Northampton replied at once: "It, as all else that I possess, fair lady, is at your devotion. Stay; I must order it."

"Nay, nay," said the Countess, "I will do so as I pass through the ante-room. Show him the letter, Rochester, and ask him simply what that man deserves who wrote it."

Thus saying, she left the room, and Rochester placed the letter of Sir Thomas Overbury in the hands of the Lord Northampton, who had by this time become his chief friend and adviser at the court. The Earl read it twice, and then returning it, said, in a marked tone, "Death!—A man," he added, "who can betray the secrets confided to him is the worst sort of traitor; but he who can use them to intimidate another, is lower than the common cut-purse upon the highway. Were this man out of prison, I should say—call him into some quiet corner of the Park,

and draw your sword. As it is, I cannot so well advise you."

The Countess of Suffolk made Rochester a sign not to continue the subject; and in a few minutes more Lady Essex re-appeared, masked, and habited with great simplicity.

"Now," she exclaimed, addressing Rochester, "you may have the honour of handing me to the barge, or, if you like it better, may accompany me till I land near the bridge, and wait for me, like a humble slave, till I re-embark; for I will have no pert lover prying into where I go."

Thus saying, she gave him her hand, and the Earl of Northampton, smiling as benignly on their criminal attachment as the Countess of Suffolk had done, conducted them to a door leading into the gardens, where he left them to pursue their way to the private stairs, which were then attached to all the great houses that lined the bank of the Thames, from Whitehall to the City.

Rochester and the Countess proceeded through the gardens, toying and jesting as they went, and then seated themselves in the barge, which speedily bore them down nearly to London Bridge. There the lady left her lover, and, followed by two men, entered upon the narrow streets of the metropolis, which she threaded till she reached the well-known house of Mrs. Turner. She paused in the little court, and sent up one of the men to see if the respectable lady she came to visit was at home, and alone.

"Say, a lady wishes to see her," said the Countess. "Mind, sirrah, gives no names—merely a lady."

"I know, my Lady," replied the man, who had accompanied his mistress more than once upon a similar errand; and entering the door, which stood open, he soon came back with tidings that good Mrs. Turner was within, and disengaged.

"Bless me, my Lady!" exclaimed Mrs. Turner, as soon as she saw the Countess, "I have not had the honour of a visit for I don't know how long; but I see that all has gone well with you. You could not look so fresh and so beautiful if you were not happy; though beautiful enough you were always, even when you were in the state of misery from which I had some little share in relieving you."

"Thanks, thanks, Mrs. Turner," replied the Countess, "the relief is not quite complete; but I think it will be

soon. However, I have another business on hand, perhaps more important still. See that there is no one in that room, and lock the door."

"Oh, there is no one, I am sure, my Lady," said Mrs. Turner. "I take good care against eaves-droppers; but you shall see." And opening the door, which led to an inner chamber, she displayed a bedroom fitted up in a style of luxury which would have shamed a palace.

She then locked a door which led from it to a back staircase; and tripping back on the tips of her toes, she sat down opposite to Lady Essex, saying, "Now, sweet lady, you see there is no one there; and, if there be anything in all the world that I can do to serve you, I am ready. I am sure, it is quite a pleasure to do anything for so great and generous a person."

"That is all nonsense, Turner," replied the Countess; "what I have to do now, cannot be a pleasure to any one concerned; but it is forced upon me. Tell me, you who have such skilful means of gratifying hearts that love, have you not means of satisfying hate, as well?"

"Really, my Lady, I don't know what you mean," said Mrs. Turner. "You must speak clearly; and I will give you a clear answer."

"Pshaw!" cried the Countess, impatiently; "half of your trade, woman, is to understand at a mere hint. Tell me, if you had an enemy, one that you dreaded, one that rendered it necessary for your safety that he should be removed, could you not find means—without much apparent dealing with him—to free yourself from your danger, and from his enmity?"

Mrs. Turner gazed silently in her face, for a moment, and then, in a voice sunk to a whisper, asked, "Is it my Lord your husband?"

"He!" cried the Countess, with a scoff. "But I have no husband," she added, the moment after; "if you mean the Earl of Essex, poor creature, my hate ceased as soon as he ceased to trouble me. The idle bond between us will be soon snapped by the fingers of law; and henceforward I care no more about him than about any of the thousands who walk the streets of London, and whom I have never seen. No, no, it is another, a much less person; for you might fear to put your fingers in the peerage. But answer me my question. Were such your case, could you not find means, I say?"

"Perhaps I could, my Lady," answered Mrs. Turner, in a grave tone. "Perhaps I could."

"Then you must make my hatred yours," replied the

Countess, "and work against my enemies as if they were your own."

"That I will, madam, I am sure, with all my heart," answered her worthy confederate. "But I must have help, my Lady."

"You shall have such assistance as shall render all easy," replied the Countess.

"Ay," rejoined Mrs. Turner; "but what I mean is, I cannot undertake this thing alone. Good Doctor Foreman must give us assistance. I doubt you would not like bloodshed?"

"No, no, no!" answered the Countess; "there must be no blood; nothing to leave a trace of how the person died. Quietly and secretly, and yet as speedily as may be."

"It will be difficult, madam," said Mrs. Turner: "a very difficult thing indeed; for though one may get at their food so as to spice one dish to their taste for ever, yet if it is to be slow poison——"

The Countess started, and her warm cheek turned somewhat pale. "Is your Ladyship ill?" asked Mrs. Turner.

"No, no!" answered the Countess; "'twas the word poison. O'ten," she added, slowly and thoughtfully, "we must make use of means we like not to hear named, and the heart shrinks at a word that is most bold in action. But it matters not;—poison—ay, poison!—So let it be!—Why should the sound scare me?—Poison. Well, woman, what was it thou wert saying?"

"Why, please you, my Lady, that if slow poison is to be used, we must bribe some man who has constant access to the person, for it must be given daily."

"None shall have access but yourself and those you send," replied the Countess. "All food may pass through your hands—and yet I wish this were not to be done. Would that it could be accomplished boldly and openly, without such silent, secret dealings; but that is impossible in this case."

"Oh dear, my Lady!" replied Mrs. Turner, in a soothing tone,—“you need not distress yourself about it. You do not know how frequently such things happen."

"Ay! Is it often done?" exclaimed the Countess.

"Daily, madam," said Mrs. Turner. "Many a rich old miser finds the way to heaven by the tender love his heir bears to his money bags; many a jealous husband troubles his lady's peace no more, after she has learnt the secret of deliverance; many a wise man's secrets find a quiet deposit in the churchyard, which otherwise might have been

noised abroad ; many a poor girl, betrayed and wearied of, finds peace, by the same hand that took it from her. But that's a shame, I say, and such means should be only used against the strong and the dangerous."

The Countess smiled bitterly. "Yes!" she said, looking down, "there are gradations even in such things as these ; and dire necessity still justifies the act that else were criminal. And so 'tis often done, good Mrs. Turner ? I have heard of it, but knew not it was frequent."

"Oh yes, my Lady," answered the fiend ; "scarce a day—I am sure not a week—passes, without a stone being put up by mourning friends in memory of those whom they would fain forget ; and once the earth is shovelled in, you know, it matters little how the dead man went. In truth, to most men, 'tis a charity to cut them off from a few years of sorrow. 'Tis a sad world, full of cares, my Lady ; and I know that, too, poor creature as I am. Here they are pressing me hard for the rent of my house ; and where I am to get it I am sure I cannot tell."

"There!" said the Countess, throwing a purse upon the table ; "and if you skillfully accomplish that which is needed, you shall be rich."

The woman seized her hand to kiss it ; but the Countess drew it away, as if a serpent stung her. "Come, no foolery," she said. "You know I pay well for services ; but they must be rendered duly. I have told you that this person shall be entirely in your power. You shall have every opportunity to practise on him your skill. He shall be altogether in your hands. Is there anything more you need ?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" said Mrs. Turner, laughing with a low titter. "I thought first it was a woman, till your Ladyship said *he* : for ladies have not, in general, such enmities to men."

"My friendships are the friendships of my friends," cried the Countess : "their hate my hate. 'Tis not that this man has injured me, but he is dangerous to one I love. He must die ! See you to the means. I have heard that the late Queen Catherine, of France, was so well served in cases such as these, that those whom she dreaded or disliked, disappeared as if by magic. The smelling of a nosegay—a pair of scented gloves—a cup of fragrant wine—would clear her court in a few hours of those who cumbered it."

"All tales ! my Lady," replied Mrs. Turner ; "except, perhaps, the wine. I doubt not that she did deliver herself of enemies by such means, and those the best, too, she

could employ; but odours to kill, must be strong scents, indeed; and, 'tis more like, some friendly valet helped to season the soup of the good Monseigneur, than that he took the poison by the nose. However, there is one thing I can say, that there is no secret in the sciences with which my friend, good Doctor Foreman, is unfurnished; and, moreover, that he will employ them all to please your Ladyship."

"Well, consult him, then," said Lady Essex; "let him know that his reward is sure. Think you he has ever practised in this sort before?"

"I must not say that, my Lady," replied Mrs. Turner, with a shrewd look; "but I know well, that in this country, and in many others, too, he has served great men in various ways. Ay, kings and princes; and, I suspect, their foes have had cause to know it, too. But he is as secret as the grave, and never babbles of the things he has done."

"That is the man we want," said the Countess; "speak to him about the matter, and let me know what he says."

"That I will, my Lady," answered Mrs. Turner. "But who is the gentleman we have to deal with?"

"You shall know hereafter," replied Lady Essex: "what I have said, is sufficient for the present."

"Nay, but dear Lady," urged her infamous confederate, "I fear Dr. Foreman may not like to engage in the matter without knowing who the person is. I have no curiosity, for my part."

"Why should he hesitate?" demanded the Countess, sharply; "one man must, to him, be the same as another, if what you have said of him be true. The butcher asks not where the ox he slays was bred or fattened, what green meadows fed it, from what streams it drank. The blow that ends it is all he has to think of; and so let it be here."

"I doubt that will not satisfy him, my Lady," said Mrs. Turner; "there are some great men he might not like to deal with—any of his kind friends and patrons, would give him pain to injure. Perhaps this very gentleman may have been favourable to him—may have employed him in things of the same kind."

"'Tis not unlikely," answered the Countess, with a gloomy smile; "but, if he have, he will employ him no further. The walls of a prison are round him, from which he will ne'er pass out alive. However, as your friend cannot penetrate into the Tower, to tell the secret to him who must die; and as he dare not, I think, betray it to any

other, the man is Sir Thomas Overbury;" and she fixed her beautiful eyes steadfastly upon the countenance of Mrs. Turner, as if to read the effect which her words produced upon the woman's mind.

It was not such as she expected; for the passion in her own heart gave even her victim higher importance than he had possessed in the eyes of others. "What! Sir Thomas Overbury!" exclaimed Mrs. Turner, in some surprise; "the friend of my Lord of Rochester?"

"He *was* his friend," replied the Countess, with marked emphasis; but now——"

She left the sentence unconcluded, and Mrs. Turner exclaimed, "Ah! I see how it is; I understand it all, now! Such friends may become dangerous, Lady. He may have secrets of my Lord of Rochester's, which must not be betrayed; perhaps, some of the King's, too."

"Perhaps so," answered the Countess; "all we know, however, is, that he lies a close prisoner in the Tower, by the King's own order; that no man—except such as have licence from his Majesty himself—is permitted to speak with him, on pain of high displeasure; and that it were better for all parties that such things were brought to an end. See to it, good Mrs. Turner, see to it! and come up to me at Northampton House to-night at supper time. The Earl will then be in the country; and you will find Lord Rochester and myself alone. If you have seen this Doctor Foreman, then, you may bring him with you; and so farewell!"

Thus saying, the Countess left her, hurried to the barge, and seating herself by her lover's side, was rowed back to Northampton House. But, as she went, she vainly endeavoured to assume the light gaiety which she had displayed as they came; for the terrible conversation which she had just held with her instrument still cast its shadow upon her. While the act was merely a matter of vague contemplation, she had felt it but little; but, as with those who approach to climb a mountain, which at a distance looked soft and easy of ascent, she found the task more fearful than she had anticipated when she came to deal with the details. Even her bold and resolute spirit felt oppressed with the first steps to the terrible crime that was to be committed; the very lowness and pettiness of the means to be employed had something strangely horrible to her imagination which she could not shake off. She sat silent and gloomy then as the boat glided over the water; and Rochester easily divined that preparations were already made for the dark act they meditated.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ONE wing of the old palace in the Tower, which has long since been swept away, was, at this time, when the King's general residence was at Whitehall, given up to those prisoners of state who were not committed to that close custody which debarred them from a general communication with their fellow men. This was the habitation of William Seymour about a week after the period when the Lady Arabella was conveyed from Lambeth to Highgate. He had, in the first instance, been placed in the Beauchamp tower, but had been removed to make way for Sir Thomas Overbury; and he now had larger apartments and better accommodation than before, as well as the range of the whole extent of the Tower itself, though the liberty of passing the gates, which he had at one time enjoyed, was denied him.

From time to time he received the visits of various friends; and Markham was with him every day, bearing him tidings or short notes from his beloved wife, though their correspondence could not be so full as during the period of her confinement at the house of Sir Thomas Parry.

The intervals of solitude to which he was subjected during various parts of the day, were passed in writing, reading, and meditating schemes of escape; and often, in deep reflection, he paced the old halls and corridors of the palace, pausing from time to time, as the sunshine penetrated through the tall windows, and fell upon mementos of men and ages gone—to read the homily it afforded, of the transitory nature of all human things.

He was one day standing thus employed, gazing at a spot on the wall where some hand had carved the name of Edward Plantagenet, and wondering to which of all the many distinguished persons who had borne that appellation the inscription referred, when a gentleman, whom he well knew, named Sir Robert Killigrew, approached with the sauntering and meditative step of a prisoner, and gave him the good morning.

"I was coming to seek you, sir," said Killigrew, "to pay you my respects as your fellow captive, which I have been since last night."

"May I ask on what cause, Sir Robert?" demanded Seymour.

"You would be long in divining," answered the knight.

"That I may well be," replied Seymour; "for as things now go on in England, there is not an act in all the wide range of those which man can perform, that may not, by the elastic stretching of the law, the cunning of the bad, and the indifference of all the rest, be construed into some crime worthy of imprisonment."

"It is but too true," replied Killigrew. "My crime was but speaking a few words with poor Sir Thomas Overbury, who called to me when I passed his window, as I was returning from a visit to my poor friend Raleigh. For this mighty misdemeanour I was committed from the council-table, and here I am, your servant at command,* so far as services may be rendered within the walls of the Tower."

"I must not welcome you, Sir Robert," replied Seymour; "for it were no friendly act to see you gladly here. What news were stirring when you left the court?"

"Good faith, but little," answered the knight, "except that Rochester exceeds all bounds in favour, impudence, rapacity, and rashness. The functions of all offices of the state are now monopolized by him; there's not a privy-councillor can wag his beard, unless my Lord of Rochester give leave; and if a suitor have ever so just a claim, good faith his gold must flow into the favourite's purse before he can obtain a hearing. He rules the court and the state, and were it not for Abbott, would rule the church too, I believe. But the archbishop frowns upon him, and holds out against the nullity of his fair Countess's marriage with Lord Essex."

"What does he do for want of Overbury?" asked Seymour. "Good faith, when I heard that the knight was arrested, I fancied that the favourite's day was at an end."

"Heaven and the King forgive you!" cried Killigrew. "Why, it was Rochester himself did it. That is known to all the world now-a-days; and as to how he does without him, he pins himself upon my Lord Northampton, that learned piece of Popish craft. He is with him daily, hourly, and by his advice rules all his actions, as he did by Overbury's."

"Poor Overbury!" said Seymour; "I have no cause to love him; but yet I cannot help pitying a man cast down by that bitterest stroke of adversity, the falsehood and ingratitude of a friend."

"I pity him too," replied Killigrew, "which was the

* Let it be remembered, that this act of intolerable tyranny was actually committed: and this, with the rest of James's conduct towards Overbury, led men reasonably to suspect that the prisoner was in possession of some horrible secret affecting the King himself.

cause why I stayed to speak to him. I know not what he has done to injure or offend you, sir, that you say you have no cause to love him, but he seems most anxious to see you, which, indeed, I was coming to tell you. Though I cannot advise you to give way to his request, for by so doing, perhaps, you may injure yourself with the Lieutenant of the Tower, who, it seems, already dreads he shall be dismissed for the short conversation I had with his prisoner."

"Oh, Wade is a good friend of mine," answered Seymour, "and is under some obligations to my house. What did Sir Thomas say?"

"As near as I can recollect," replied Sir Robert Killigrew, "that it would be a great consolation to him if he could speak with you or the Lady Arabella. But take care what you do; for I cannot but think that it is rash to make the attempt. The King's orders are most strict, that no one, not his nearest friends, not his own father, should have a moment's interview with him."

"I will see him, nevertheless, if it be possible," answered Seymour. "The man who could refuse consolation, however small, to a poor captive shut out from human intercourse, must have a cold heart indeed, let the risk be what it may. I am sure you do not regret your captivity for such a cause, Sir Robert?"

"I regret my captivity, whatever be the reason," replied the knight; "but yet I would do the same to-morrow, I confess."

"Well, I will go watch my opportunity," replied Seymour; "no one can tell what changes may be made; but if they remove him to the Bell-tower, beneath the lantern, or to one of the dungeons, the occasion will be missed."

"Farewell, then, for the present," replied Sir Robert Killigrew; "I had better not accompany you."

"Perhaps not," said Seymour.

Bidding him adieu, and then taking his way towards the tower in which Sir Thomas Overbury was confined, he passed once or twice under the windows without looking up, seeing that there were several persons in the open space between the walls. At length, Overbury's window opened, but Seymour marked what he did not, that there was a workman wheeling a barrow round the other side of the tower, and, taking another turn, he came back again, and looked around.

"Hist, hist!" cried the prisoner; "speak to me for a moment, Mr. Seymour."

"I will be back in an instant," replied the other, "when I make sure that we are not observed."

In a few minutes, he again paused beneath the window, the sill of which was nearly level with his head, but a little above, and, looking up, he said, "Now, Sir Thomas, the workmen have gone to dinner; there is no one on the walls—what would you say?"

"Many things—many things," answered Overbury; "but the time is short, and I cannot say all. I have injured you, Mr. Seymour,—you and the Lady Arabella too. I would fain have your forgiveness, and beseech hers. I did it to serve a faithless man, who has placed me within these bars. I, it was, who informed the King of your meetings, and brought about your ruin. Had I known that you were married, I would have cut out my tongue ere I had uttered those words!"

"But did you not, likewise, Sir Thomas, write to warn her to escape?" asked Seymour. "I have heard so on good authority, and that such was one of your offences with the King."

"I did, I did," answered the knight; "but it was too late."

"Well, then," rejoined Seymour, "the good act blots out the bad one. You have my forgiveness freely, Sir Thomas; and I may well assure you of my dear wife's also; for she it was who wrote to tell me you had done so, with words of kindness and gratitude."

"God's blessing upon her!" cried the captive; "but I would fain do more. You are aware, sir, doubtless, that a permission in due form, under the King's own hand, was given for the lady's marriage to a subject. Why not use it for a justification?"

"It has been urged already," replied Seymour; "but the King heeds it not. It was given to the Lady Arabella by the Countess of Shrewsbury; and we have demanded, all of us, if we have been guilty, that a public trial should take place. But the laws are now the common mockery of every idle fellow at the court."

"It is so, indeed," replied Sir Thomas Overbury, in a sad tone; "I know it but too feelingly. So, that is vain," he added, after a moment's thought, "then, you have nothing left but flight."

"How can it be effected?" asked Seymour, in a doubtful tone.

"By you—as easily as the wind waves yonder flag," replied the knight. "Oh, had I but your liberty to walk

about unwatched, I would place the seas betwixt myself and England ere three days were over."

"But how—but how?" demanded Seymour. "If you show me how, I will thank you indeed."

"In a thousand ways," answered the captive. "Why not, in a workman's dress, at some unsuspected hour, take yonder barrow, and wheel it through the gates? Who would stop you—who would ask a question? I have seen it done a dozen times at least.—Why not, habited as a carter, follow some empty waggon that has brought billets or merchandise into the fortress?"

"The plan is not a bad one, in truth," said Seymour; "perhaps, if driven to it, I may execute it."

"Driven to it!" exclaimed Sir Thomas Overbury. "Is not every man, who is detained a captive here unjustly, driven to take measures for his own deliverance? Or do you expect that the King will be mollified, and give his kind consent to your re-union with your fair wife? Ah, my good sir! you do not know the man. Were you aware of all that I could tell, you would entertain no hope. Dark and dreadful, sir, dark and dreadful are the secrets of that palace at Whitehall. But, if they mind not what they do, and continue this persecution of an innocent man, those secrets shall be told, let them affect whom they may."

"I beseech you, Sir Thomas Overbury," said Seymour, "be careful. Remember, rash words may provoke revenge; and you are in the hands of men both powerful and unscrupulous. Threats, I fear, will avail but little."

"I have no other means!" exclaimed Sir Thomas, vehemently; "the hope of truth, kindness, or justice from them is vain. 'Tis but from their fears that I can entertain any expectations. But, hush!" he exclaimed, "hush!—walk on, walk on! I see the Lieutenant coming along the wall."

Seymour, who was himself hidden by the tower, instantly proceeded in the direction of another building, some way before him, with his arms folded on his chest, and his eyes bent down to the ground, in meditation on what he had just heard. He knew not that the Lieutenant was coming in the opposite direction; but after he had walked forward about a hundred yards, that officer came down by some steps from the wall, and joined him, saying, "Give you good morning, sir; I hope you are well to-day!"

"As well as one can be, Wade, in this place," replied Seymour, "and that is not too well."

"Faith, sir, I do not know," answered Wade, "I feel myself very well here, and do not wish to change."

"I am sure I hope you may remain, Wade," replied the prisoner, "as it satisfies yourself; and your loss would be a sad stroke on me."

"Yet, Mr. Seymour, I am afraid we must both make up our mind to my going," said the Lieutenant. "The crows of the court are picking a hole in my coat, because a gentleman, passing through, spoke for a few moments with Sir Thomas Overbury, at his window, and I am to be dismissed, it seems. Sir Gervase Elways has given the Lord Rochester a thousand pounds, I hear, to have the post; so he is sure to get it. He may have more to give before he has done, however."

"To what amount do you think?" asked Seymour, with a smile. "The rapacity of these people is somewhat extensive."

"To the amount of his conscience and his soul, perhaps," replied the officer, in a meaning tone. "But these things do not do to talk of, Mr. Seymour; and if they drive me out so unjustly, I should much like to take some who are within these walls along with me."

"Would to heaven you would make me of the number!" replied Seymour.

The Lieutenant gazed at him with a smile, and then answered: "You know, sir, that there is not a man in the Tower whom I would sooner see out of it than yourself, from gratitude to my good Lord of Hertford. But in these matters, sir, every one must take care of himself, and I fear I must not do anything to help you out."

"Thanks for your good wishes, Wade, at all events," replied Seymour. "So poor Sir Thomas Overbury is kept a close prisoner?"

"Too close, sir," said the Lieutenant; "too close not to make men think that the offence charged against him is but a pretext, and that there is darker work below. I am not a man to serve their purposes, however; and I fancy my crime is more refusing to let some persons have access to him, than permitting others. My Lord of Rochester sent a man here yesterday morning to wait upon him, as he said—a fellow whose look I love not. So I told him that no one should wait upon a close prisoner in my custody but my own servants. For them I can be answerable, not for others. This is my true fault, sir. But you must be good enough, in your walks, not to approach the Beau-

champ-tower, whatever you do, as, if any one is seen speaking with the poor man again, I must place him in a less convenient room, and I do not wish to deal harshly with one I so much pity."

"You are a good fellow, Wade," replied Seymour, shaking his hand; and, leaving the Lieutenant, he walked on, saying to himself, this is something gained: Wade will shut his eyes as far as possible, that is clear.—Escape, then, will be easy; but it must be executed before he is removed."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE morning meal was over at the house of Mr. Conyers; and the Lady Arabella, rising from the table, approached one of the windows which stood open, and gazed out upon the green lawn and the fine old trees, while an expression of deep melancholy came over her face, which had before been cheerful. As she thus stood, the master of the mansion approached her, saying, "'Tis a beautiful day, lady; would you not like to walk forth?"

"Not yet," answered Arabella. "I was thinking, Mr. Conyers, how quietly life might pass in such a sweet place as this, without ever stirring beyond those walls; and I was asking myself what it was that made confinement within them so burdensome. Here I have almost all that heart could desire,—a kind host and hostess, every luxury that wealth can afford, fine sights before my eyes, sweet sounds for my ear, the gentle breath of summer fanning my brow, and space as large to roam through at my will as, to say sooth, a woman's feeble frame can well wander over untired. And yet, I cannot school my heart to content."

Mr. Conyers did not know well how to answer her. He was not willing to jar a thoughtful mind with a trite common-place, and therefore he only inquired, "Pray, how did you settle the question, dear lady?"

"I asked myself if liberty was all that I wanted," continued Arabella; "that bright spectre, the reality of which man can never know on earth; for, if we be not slaves to others, we are still slaves to our own infirmities; and this flesh is the true prison after all. But I have never sought much liberty. I have been right willing to bow my designs to those of others, to yield ready obedience where, perhaps,

I had a right to resist, striving to make my own heart my world, where no one can forbid the spirit from wandering in the garden which itself has planted. I have sought little else but that. I will tell you what it is that makes even this sweet spot a prison. It is not that I cannot pass those gates; for, were I happier, I should never wish to pass them. I have no desire for the wide world. But it is, that those I love can never enter them,—that the friends who are dearest, the hearts that cherish me, the souls with which mine is linked, have no admission here. I will go weep," she cried, suddenly dashing a tear from her dark eye-lashes—"I will go weep, and I shall be better then."

Thus saying, she quitted the room, while Mr. Conyers stood at the window with a sad and thoughtful brow.

"I will be gaoler no longer," he said, after a long pause; "this sweet girl is shamefully ill-treated; and if an Englishman's rights and liberties be really valuable, they should be as dear to me in the person of another as of myself. I have served this King well enough, without having this task thrust upon me. I will be a gaoler no longer, and so I'll tell the King to-morrow when I see him."

"What are you muttering there, Conyers?" asked his wife, who was still sitting at the table.

"I was saying, Joan," replied Mr. Conyers, "that I have had enough of a bad and disgraceful task, which no one had a right to force upon me, without even asking my consent. Let the servants know, that the strict watch which I have seen kept up, without my orders, displeases me."

"But it was by the King's orders," replied the lady, "and you forget that you lose all chance of promotion, if you disobey."

"Out upon promotion at such a price!" replied her husband. "I have yielded to this too long. I am not a turn-key; my servants are not spies, or, if they are, they shall stay no longer here. If the King must have such vermin, let him keep them himself, I will not. What right had he to impose such a trade upon me? and as I have never promised to obey, I will do so no more. I even reproach myself that I have done it so long already. The grief of the sweet lady touches me. Were she harsh and vehement, proud and indignant under injustice, I might feel it less; but she bears her wrongs with such gentle meekness, even when she feels them most poignantly, that it were a base heart indeed which did not share her sorrow and take its part with her."

"Well, Conyers," answered the lady, "I grieve for her, too; but I see no cause why you should sacrifice yourself

for others; and you must recollect that if she were anywhere else she might be treated still more harshly."

"That comforts me for the past," answered her husband. "If I had refused to receive her, others would have been found to undertake any base work that a king may require of a subject; but I can bear it no longer; and at all events none shall give orders in my house but myself.—Baldock," he continued, as a servant entered to clear the table, "call the men and women of the household hither. My own, I mean, not the Lady Arabella's people."

The servant retired, and Mr. Conyers walked with a hasty step up and down the room, still murmuring to himself, "It is too much."

In a few minutes the greater part of the household, which, as was the case in every gentleman's establishment of those days, was about five times as numerous as at present, was arrayed at the further end of the room, displaying a number of somewhat anxious faces; for their master's summons had been accompanied by an intimation from him who bore it, that Mr. Conyers seemed somewhat angry.

"Shut the door," said that gentleman. "Now, mark me, men and maids. I have seen things that I dislike. No matter what. But a spy is a thing I dislike, a base, unworthy animal, which I will drive forth from my house like mice or rats, or any other vermin. Let me have none of them, or if I catch them, beware their ears.—You all know me well. I love my people as my own family, while they are honest and true; but no person, not the highest in the land, has a right to give orders in this house but myself, and if those orders are disgraceful to a good man of an upright heart, I will find means to punish him who obeys them. You all understand me, so away without a word."

"Well, Conyers, you know best," replied his wife, as the servants withdrew, "but I cannot help thinking——"

"Do not think at all, good wife," replied her husband, "except about puddings and pies. In this matter I am determined, so take care that I have no meddling. Tomorrow I go to the King, and shall tell him what I think. He may send me to the Tower if he pleases; for it seems he may put an English gentleman in gaol at his will, but he has no power to make him a gaoler."

While these events were taking place below, Arabella retired to her room, and for some time gave way to tears. She had just wiped away the drops from her eyes, when Ida Mara entered, and approached her in silence, gazing upon that fair face, on which the recent marks of grief were still evident.

"Dear lady, you are very sad," said Ida Mara, at length; "but nevertheless I am in great hopes that in a few days you will be free. I told you last night what I had heard, that the difficulties respecting the papers of the ship were all removed, and that this day she would be prepared to sail to whatever port you like."

"God send it," answered Arabella, "for though I am better in health, Ida, I am very gloomy. This long absence from my husband, the difficulties and dangers of this enterprise, the long, wide-spread, misty blank of the future, all rise up before my mind, and agitate and terrify me."

Ida Mara continued for some minutes in conversation with her mistress, trying to soothe and cheer her; and when she had in some degree succeeded, she added, "I hope I shall have more news for you in an hour; for I must now go forth to see some one who has written, asking me to come along the road to Hornsey. I do not know the hand, but it is in good Italian, and may be from some of your friends."

"Well, go, then; go, Ida," replied the lady, "but take care. I always fear for you, after that adventure you told me of in London; and what should I do without you, my dear girl?"

"I have often thought of that, lady," replied Ida Mara; "but I have less fear now. You have friends here, and there are fortunate circumstances more than you know of."

"Indeed!" said Arabella. "What may that be?"

"First," answered Ida Mara, "Mr. Conyers has just told the servants that he will have no spying into your actions, and is angry that you have been so watched. This is a great point gained, for servants soon learn to take the tone of their masters. But there is something more which I have thought, for these three days, to speak to you about. I often asked myself if the King's will, or anything else, were to take me away from you, what you would do for assistance? Your maid Jane is faithful enough, I believe; but she wants quickness, forethought, and skill. A day or two ago, however, I found that you have another friend in the house, the good woman Maude, who often comes in to see if she can help you."

"Indeed!" cried Arabella; "I should not have thought it, for she is somewhat rude and uncouth in speech."

"Ah, dearest lady!" replied Ida Mara, shaking her head, "they say in my country, that the sweetest oranges have the roughest rinds. She came three days ago into my chamber, and talked long about you. The good soul wept when she spoke of all that you have suffered, and said such

words of the King as would send her into prison, were they heard. She said she was born upon the lands of your grandfather, Sir William Cavendish, and I am sure, quite sure, from all she told me, that you may trust to her entirely. She was sent here, it seems, the day of your arrival, to see what was in the packet that Markham brought. She laughed when she told me, saying, that, as it was, there was nothing in it which might not be mentioned, but that if there had been, she would have lost her eyes for the time, at all events. She is clever, too, and shrewd, though in a homely way; but I am sure you might trust her, lady, if anything should take me from you."

"Ida, tell me the truth," said Arabella, with an anxious look; "have you heard anything that makes you suspect such a separation? Do you believe that it is about to take place?"

"No, lady; no, dear lady," replied the fair Italian girl. "I have heard nothing but what I have told you in truth. I would not deceive you on any account: no, not for your own good; for it is not right, and I never saw anything but evil come of doing wrong. I know not how it was, but when I saw this note written in a hand I did not know, a foolish fancy came across my mind, I do not well know what,—a fear—no, scarcely a fear,—a doubt; and I determined, ere I went, to tell you what I thought of Maude."

"I wish you would not go, Ida," said the lady; "indeed, I wish you would not go."

"Nay, but I must," answered Ida Mara; "they may wish to see me about some point of vital consequence, on which your welfare would depend. I must go, indeed; and the sun is getting high, so that I ought not to tarry longer; I will be back again with all speed, dear lady. It was a foolish fancy of mine,—idle and groundless, I am sure."

Thus saying, she kissed Arabella's hand and withdrew.

For several minutes the lady sat in sad and apprehensive meditation, with her eyes cast down towards the ground; but then she rose with a sigh, and, covering her head, walked out into the grounds, sauntering slowly along in the sunshine. After that, she sat herself down at the foot of an old oak, the wide contorted branches of which, with their thick covering of leaves, afforded a pleasant shade. Musing sadly, she there remained for near an hour, raising her eyes from time to time towards the gates, which she still kept within sight. Ida Mara, however, did not appear, and Arabella became anxious.

In about a quarter of an hour, Mrs. Conyers came out

and joined her, trying to give her consolation, after her fashion; but she was not a person with whom the poor captive's heart could feel at ease. She knew her to be worldly and selfish; and though devoted to her husband, and obedient to his wishes, there was a great difference in the manners of the two, even when doing the same things, which Arabella felt with all the sensitiveness of misfortune. Her presence, then, under the anxiety which oppressed her, was a burden rather than a relief; and after remaining, out of courtesy, for about a quarter of an hour, she rose, and went back to her apartments.

Time passed, and Ida Mara did not come; and, at length, Arabella, giving way to the feelings she could not restrain, wept long and bitterly. Rousing herself, at length, she called her maid from a neighbouring room, "Tell Cobham," she said, "to come to me instantly. Ida has not returned?" she asked, with a last lingering hope.

"No, my lady," replied the maid; "Mistress Ida went out near three hours ago, but has not yet come back. I wonder what can have become of her."

"Send Cobham here," repeated Arabella, in a faint tone; and sitting down again, she leaned her head upon her hand, with a sickening feeling of desolation at her heart.

"Cobham," she said, as soon as the man appeared, "I am anxious about my poor Ida Mara. She went out three hours ago to take a short walk towards Hornsey, expecting to be back immediately, but she has never returned, and I fear some evil has befallen her. I wish you would take another man, and seek for her in that direction. Make inquiries of all the people that you see, and bring me word what they say. You know how dearly I love her."

"So does everybody, madam," replied the man. "I would rather lose my hand than that any ill should befall her. I will leave nothing undone to find her, lady, and be back as soon as possible."

It was nearly evening when he returned, but he returned alone; and Arabella, when from the window she saw him coming, hastened out herself to meet him.

"Have you no news?" she cried; "have you no news?"

"Nothing satisfactory, lady," replied the man; "but I met a gentleman about half an hour ago, who, when I made inquiries of him, drew me aside from the other man, and asked me my name. I told him, and he then gave me this note for you, telling me to bear it to you with all speed, and to deliver it in secret. He said, moreover, that some of the King's people had been about all the morning, adding, he doubted not that they had taken the young gentle-

woman—perhaps before the council. I came back to bring you the note, leaving my companion to pursue the search; and now I will go back to help him, though I fear it will be in vain.”

“Go, go, good Cobham,” replied Arabella, concealing the note in her bosom with a trembling hand; “but be back at night, for I may need you. And yet, no,” she added, “I will not be so selfish. Seek my poor Ida, wherever she is likely to be found. Bring me some tidings of her, at all events.”

“But if they have taken her away to the court,” answered the servant, “they will never let me bring her back.”

“It is not that I fear,” said Arabella; “if she be at the court, she is at least in safety. But there are other things I dread, good Cobham. She has enemies, as who has not? Seek for her, then, till dark; and if you find her not, set out by day-break to-morrow for the court. To hear that she is there, will be a relief to me; but I fear—I much fear it is not so. You will there gain tidings, however, whether she has been brought before the King or not. If she have, I shall be satisfied;—but indeed, indeed, I must have tidings of her.”

“You shall, madam, if human power can gain them,” replied the man; and, while he proceeded to execute his task, Arabella returned to the house.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

“No news of her! no news of her!” said Arabella, addressing in a sad tone the maid Jane, who was arranging some articles of dress in her room.

“Indeed, lady,” replied the maid, with a manner so much less earnest than Arabella’s own feelings, that it seemed to her harsh and cold,—“Indeed, lady, I am sorry to hear that; but I dare say the King’s people have got hold of her. They tried to question me one night at Greenwich; and when I said I had nothing to tell, they threatened to apprehend me, and bring me before the council.”

“I trust it is into their hands she has fallen,” said her mistress, “for then she has nothing to fear.—Now leave me, good girl, for I would fain think over this matter.”

The maid obeyed; and the moment she was gone Arabella locked the door, drew forth the note from her bosom,

and read it with eager eyes. As she did so she trembled violently, and sank down into a chair, murmuring, "Alone, alone!—All this to be done, and no one to help me!—Oh, Ida, Ida, it was cruel to take you from me! What is to be done? My thoughts are all in confusion. How can I ever carry this through by myself!" And bending down her head, she leaned her forehead upon her hand, and closed her eyes, as if seeking to still the busy and hurrying images of danger and disaster which whirled through her brain.

"But the good woman Maude," she said, at length—"Ida told me she would give me aid. Oh, can I trust her? And even if I can, 'tis sad to have none but a stranger to rely on for support. Oh, Ida, dear, good friend, where art thou now?—But it must be done. That girl Jane I can place no trust in. She is cold and selfish; ay, and dull too. I must speak to the woman Maude, and that directly." And rising, she unlocked the door and called the maid.

"Jane," she said, "I wish you to remove all those things from the end of the room, into that little cabinet there, and——"

"Dear lady," exclaimed the girl, interrupting her, "I can never do it by myself. I must have one of the men to help me."

"I was going to say you cannot do it by yourself," replied Arabella, "but I will not have the men brought hither. Go and call good Mistress Maude: she is strong and willing, and I know her."

The girl obeyed, and in a few minutes returned with the person she had been sent to seek. Having received the directions of the lady, they proceeded to execute them; and Arabella continued to gaze upon them as they did so, with a hesitating, uncertain look, as if she wished to speak, yet was afraid.

At length, however, when they had done, she broke silence, saying, "My poor Ida, whom they have taken from me, tells me, Maude, that you were born upon my grandfather's estate at Hardwick, in Derbyshire. I should like much to talk with you about it, but have something to do just now. Can you come to me in an hour?"

"Oh, yes, dear lady," replied the good woman. "I'll come without fail. I often wished to tell you, but did not venture to speak to so great a lady."

"A very poor one now," replied Arabella, "and never a very proud one, Maude. Pray come."

"That I will, madam," answered the servant, and retired.

For half-an-hour more the maid Jane continued to bustle

about the chamber, doing but little, yet fancying herself very busy. At the end of that time, however, she left the room, and before the hour was fully gone, Maude was standing by the side of Arabella's chair. The question of Hardwick and Sir William Cavendish was soon discussed; and Arabella, looking up in the good servant's face, said, in a sad tone, "My good mother, whom you talk of, never thought to see her child so unhappy as I am; and she was spared the sight."

"'Tis a sad case, dear lady, 'tis a sad case," replied the servant. "When I think of it, and how little you deserve such treatment, I could tear the eyes out of that King, or cry."

"And now," said Arabella, "they have taken Ida Mara from me, at the very moment I needed aid and comfort most; and I have none to help me."

"Don't say that, lady; don't say that," cried the good woman; "I am not like Mistress Ida, to be sure; for she is as gentle and clever a young lady, as I am a rough and dull poor creature; but still I will help you in any way that you may command, cost what it may."

"Will you, indeed?" asked Arabella, taking her hand, and gazing up earnestly in her face.

"That I will, lady," replied the maid, "even if it goes with my head. I never knew any one that would not help you; you get round everybody's heart; and my poor master is half mad at being made your gaoler. You have nothing to do but to command; I will obey you, without one care for the rest."

Arabella covered her eyes with her hands, and burst into a violent and sobbing fit of tears; for the words of affection and kindness, in moments of deep sorrow and anxiety, seem, by their gentle touch, to unfetter the strongest feelings of the heart, and leave them to break forth in unrestrained emotion.

She soon recovered, however, and pressing the servant's hand in both her own, she cried, "Thank you, thank you! Mr. Conyers said something about going to the King to-morrow; do you know when he sets out?"

"At two, madam," said the good woman; "his horses are ordered at that hour; and Mrs. Conyers goes with him."

"Oh, that will just do," exclaimed the lady, "for the hour named is three. I must send the girl Jane away on some pretence."

"Oh, I will give her occupation, madam," replied Maude; "I will give her occupation, madam, that is the best

time of all ; for there is a match of foot-ball on Highgate Green, and most of the men my master does not take with him, will be there, I dare say ; for, when the cat's away, the mice will play, you know, lady. Pray, have you any one you love coming to see you ? If you have, I will take care that gates shall open and doors be undone, without any one knowing aught about it."

"No," answered Arabella, timidly and looking anxiously in the woman's face to mark the effect produced by what she was about to say ; "it is not that, good Maude, but, on the contrary, I am going to see those I love."

The woman looked surprised, and paused a moment thoughtfully, without reply.

"Well, it does not matter," she said, at length, "whatever you wish I will do, lady. But I hope you have friends without to take care of you when you are there."

"Many," answered Arabella, "many, good Maude, watching for me anxiously. If, therefore, you can contrive to give occupation to my girl Jane, and come to me as soon as ever your master and mistress are gone out, you will confer an everlasting obligation upon one who will never be unthankful, whether she have the means of showing her gratitude or not."

"Fear not, lady ; fear not, sweet lady," replied Maude ; "nothing shall stop me ; and now I understand what you mean, all shall be ready. But I suppose we shall have Master Cobham to help us ?"

"Alas ! no," replied the lady ; "he is seeking for poor Ida ; and I fear will have occupation enough."

"Well, well, we can do without," rejoined Maude. "But I had better go now, for fear people should suspect anything."

During the many hours which had yet to run ere Arabella's project of escape could be executed, as may be well supposed, her mind continued in a state of agitation and alarm, which would have overthrown her corporeal powers, and rendered her unfit for the task, had not the sweet hope of seeing him she so dearly loved given her support and strength. Sleep visited her eyelids but little ; and the very efforts she made to overcome her apprehensions and invigorate herself for the performance of her purpose, but tended to unnerve her.

She did her best, however, to appear cheerful and at ease in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Conyers ; and Time, though his wings seemed cut during the first hours of the morning, at length brought about the moment she desired.

A little after two, she saw the coach, which contained

her host and hostess, roll away from the door of the house, followed by all the train of servants and horses, which were the customary accompaniments of ever so short a journey in those days, with people of wealth and station. Almost immediately afterwards, while she was waiting in agitated expectation for the coming of the good woman Maude, her maid Jane entered, and asked her mistress's permission to go out for a short time, adding, in a deprecatory tone, "I have not been beyond the gates for more than a fortnight."

Arabella gave the permission with almost too much readiness; and in ten minutes after, she saw a gay party of men and maids take their way up the gravel walk.

The next instant, there was a tap at the door; and Maude came in, exclaiming, "Now, lady, now, the house is quite clear; there is nobody left but the cook and myself, and the old butler, who is in the buttery at the back of the house, corking the wine, and grumbling at the young lads for leaving him alone, though he has given them permission. I have brought you a cup of wine and a manchet, to strengthen you for your walk."

"But I must dress first," cried Arabella, whose limbs would scarcely support her. "I must not go in this garb."

"Take some wine, lady; take some wine," said her companion; "there is much courage in the bottle. What dress shall I give you?"

Arabella put her lips to the cup which the woman held, and took a small portion of the wine. "You will find it there, Maude," she said, "in that cupboard. There is the key. It is wrapped in linen."

Her companion took the key, opened the closet, and brought out the packet, which had by this time been opened; but, as she carried it to the bed-side, a sword fell out, and starting she exclaimed, "Why, goodness, lady, it is a man's dress!"

"Ay, good Maude," answered Arabella, while the colour rose warmly into her cheek. "I could not hope for security in any other guise. You must help me to put it on, for I am so little accustomed to such a thing that I should never accomplish it alone."

"Oh, I have seen many a lady in a man's dress," answered Maude, "in masques and mummings, in the Queen's time. Take heart, take heart, dear lady; do not let that frighten you. It matters not much what be the garb, so that you be safe under it. Here is a goodly doublet, trimmed with bugles. You had better put this on first. Let me untie your dress, lady—ay, it is pinned, I

sec. Come, come, let me help you, I will do it as soon again; your hands tremble so."

Arabella's gown was soon stripped off; and, in its place, her fair form was clothed in a velvet coat, though, to say truth, it needed some artful filling out to make it in any degree fit her slender waist.

"Why, these wide French hose," cried Maude, taking them up from the bed upon which she had laid them, "are as good as a petticoat at any time."

"Better for my purpose," answered Arabella, with a faint smile. "Yet I think I should die with shame to be seen in them, were it not for so great an object. That cloak is very large, however, and will nearly hide me altogether."

Some further progress was then made in dressing her, and a long pair of russet boots with red tops, the least in size that Markham could procure, were drawn over her small feet and slender limbs. She was obliged to take them off again, however, for they were still too large.

"In truth," she said "they will take slippers and all. Give me the shoes, good Maude. Now for the rapier," she continued, when the boots were once more fitted on. "Heaven send I have not to draw it; for I fear the sight of a sword well nigh as much as the King."

The cloak was then put on, and a large black hat, having some of the long locks of hair—at that time in fashion amongst men—fastened into the crown, was pulled over her fair brow.

"There now," cried Maude; "you are as gallant-looking as a young cavalier as I should wish to look at."

"A sad, faint-hearted one," answered Arabella. "Run, good Maude, run and see if the way be clear. I fear my little strength will fail me, if we stay long."

"Finish the wine, lady; finish the wine, and take some bread with it," answered her companion. "I will go and make sure that all is right. Drink the wine, I beseech you. You need not think of your head. Fear will take off the effect."

Thus saying, she sped away, and returned in a few minutes, saying "All is safe, the cook is by the kitchen fire, sound asleep; and I hear old Jones thumping at his bottles. The door is wide open, and the iron gates unlocked. Come, lady, come, you had better lose no time."

"Come with me to the iron gates, Maude," said Arabella, in a beseeching tone; "I can scarcely keep my feet."

"That I will, lady," answered the good woman.—
 "Courage, courage! the worst of the business is over."

"Would that it were," answered Arabella, leaning on her arm and proceeding down the stairs.

Nothing occurred, however, to increase her apprehension; all was silent in the house, the quiet sunshine sleeping on the hall-floor, and the insect world buzzing without. Not a sound met the ear, but that hum, and the sighing of a light wind through the trees. Making a great effort, Arabella quitted the arm of her companion, when they issued forth from the door, and walking with an unsteady step along the path, soon reached the gates. There, Maude drew one of the valves back, and the lady put a ring into her hand.

"No, no," she said, "I will none of it. Keep diamonds for yourself, lady; but if you will give me something, I will take your gloves which lie upon the table, just to think of you by."

"Take anything, good Maude," replied Arabella; "and, above all, my truest thanks."

Thus saying, she passed out, and the maid closed the gates, and retreated.

Arabella stood alone, for a moment or two, in the open road, with her heart faint, and her brain turning round. She felt lonely, desolate, ashamed, terrified; she was like some domesticated bird just escaped from its cage, not knowing which way to turn in the wide world around her.

The next instant, however, her eye fell upon the form of a man, well dressed, and of gentlemanly air, in the lane which ran under the walls of the grounds. Her first impulse would have led her to push open the gate and run back; but, the moment after, she thought she recognised the person who was now approaching, though she had last seen him in a very different garb.

"Oh! it is—it must be—I am sure it is Markham," she cried, panting for breath; and then, running on, she met him and caught his arm for support.

"Right! right! This is all right, lady," he said; "everything is ready; I have horses at hand—a boat waits you at Blackwall—a ship at Leigh."

"But my husband! my husband!" said Arabella.

"He is by this time free," replied Markham; "you will soon see him. My Lord of Hertford commends himself to you, and has sent down men and maids to meet you."

"But my poor Ida Mara," asked Arabella; "have you heard of her?"

"No, indeed," answered Markham; "she must have

been apprehended; but if so, she is quite safe. Come, lady, come."

Supporting her by the arm, Markham hurried on down the lane towards Newington, and through several other intricate turnings and windings, the rapid pace at which they went relieving the lady, in some degree, from her fears, by preventing her thoughts from resting on her own situation. She felt tired and exhausted, however; when, at the distance of about a mile and a half from Mr. Conyers' house, they came within sight of the small road-side inn, called "The Rose." Three strong horses stood before the door, with a man holding them, and a gentleman looking up the road.

"That is Crompton," said Markham; "an old friend of your family."

"How much I have to thank you all for," answered Arabella; and the next minute Crompton, advancing, took her by the hand, exclaiming, "How are you, sir? I am very happy to see you here."

The moment she paused, however, agitation and apprehension took possession of her again.

"I feel sick and faint," she said; and the ostler, who was holding the horses, remarking her face turn deadly pale, inquired, "Shall I call for some wine? The young gentleman seems ill."

"No, no," answered Arabella; "some water. I am only fatigued with a long quick walk."

Water was accordingly brought; and then Markham, approaching to assist her, said, "We are rather late; we had better make haste."

He then aided her to mount, while Crompton paid the ostler, who shook his head, observing, "The young gentleman will hardly hold out to London, I think." But the moment after, her paleness disappeared, blood mounted into her face, and, with a crimson cheek, she rode on with Markham.

Crompton followed them immediately, and, pursuing the by-paths, with which they were well acquainted, the two gentlemen led her at a quick pace towards Blackwall. They reached the shore of the river about six o'clock, and there they found waiting a boat with four oars, containing two of her old men-servants, and two women.

"We will see you down the river," said Markham; "but Crompton and I must there leave you. The boat behind contains your apparel and Mr. Seymour's."

"But my husband!" asked Arabella, in a low voice; "where is my husband, sir?"

"He will follow, he will follow," answered Markham.

"Sit here, sir," said Crompton, giving a sign to Markham to be cautious; "remember, lady," he continued, in a whisper, "these boatmen know nothing of the scheme;" and, ordering the rowers to pull away, they were soon skimming over the bosom of the Thames.

The boat directed its course at once to Gravesend, which they reached two or three hours after nightfall.

"We must land here for a moment or two," whispered Crompton to the lady; "but Markham will arrange with the men to take you on, while you get some refreshment."

Poor Arabella did all they wished; and though it was not without difficulty that her companions persuaded the rowers to go on to Leigh, a large bribe ultimately induced them to consent, and the lady and her companions were soon once more upon the Thames. The night, fortunately, was warm and clear; and although Arabella was wearied and exhausted with anxiety, exertion and want of repose during the preceding night, she closed not an eye, but watched the progress of the boat, with her thoughts full of him she loved; the hope of soon seeing him mingling with fears for his safety, and giving plentiful occupation for the busy mind during the whole night.

At length the sky began to glow with the first beams of the morning; and a ship of considerable size was seen lying about a mile further down the river.

"There is the vessel, lady," whispered Markham, "which I hope will soon bear you and your husband safe to the shores of France."

"Perhaps he may be on board already," said Arabella, raising her head, which had been drooping with pure lassitude. "That indeed would give me new life."

"Perhaps he may be so," replied Markham, "but yet I doubt it. The wind is freshening for your voyage, however."

"We must stay for him at all events," cried Arabella; "if he has not escaped, I cannot make up my mind to go."

"Indeed you are wrong," answered her companion, in the same low tone; "recollect it is you who are the subject of the King's persecution, not Mr. Seymour. You once safe in a foreign land, his liberation would soon follow. I doubt not, ere three months were over, the King's full consent to your union would be given, in order to induce you to return."

Arabella saw that there was some truth in what he said; but her mind took instant alarm at Markham's words. "I

think you are apprehensive that he has not escaped," she said, in as firm a tone as she could command.

"No, indeed I am not," he replied; "I feel confident he has; for Sir George Rodney, Sir Harry West, and many faithful friends, are all aiding him, and Wade, the Lieutenant of the Tower, disgusted at the treatment of the court, will keep no very watchful eye upon his prisoner."

"God send it!" cried Arabella.

"We shall soon know," rejoined Markham, "for he must be here in an hour at the latest."

"I hope—I trust he is on board already," answered Arabella. "I have a fancy that it is so;" and she went on buoying herself up with the happy expectation, till they were alongside of the vessel, and she could see the people upon deck.

Her husband was not amongst them. "He may be below," she thought; and her first question when lifted into the vessel was, "Has Mr. Seymour arrived?"

The answer was in the negative, and the hope which had supported her during the last two hours being taken away, she sank at once, fainting, into the arms of Crompton, who was aiding her to her seat.

It was long ere she recovered herself sufficiently to speak; and then, gazing around her, she found herself in the cabin of the vessel, with the two maids who had been waiting for her at Blackwall, using means to bring her to herself. She closed her eyes again, for Seymour was not there. In about twenty minutes after, there was a knock at the door; and starting up, she exclaimed in a weak tone, but eagerly, "Open it, open it, perhaps he has come."

"But it was only Markham who appeared."

"Dear lady," he said, approaching her side, "Mr. Seymour has not arrived, and there is nothing to be seen of him, as far as we can see up the river. Every moment that you stay endangers your safety. If he has escaped, he has gone to some other port; if not, your remaining here is ruinous to him and to yourself."

"Half an hour, yet half an hour," cried Arabella; "I beseech, entreat you, my kind friend, stay but that short space."

"Be it as you will, madam," replied Sir Griffin Markham, in a grave tone; "but that one half hour may be regretted bitterly hereafter, when it cannot be recalled."

"Well then, half that time," said Arabella; and bow-

ing, the gentleman retired, giving orders to have everything ready to set sail the instant the signal was given.

The quarter of an hour was barely at an end, when he again went down, and approaching Arabella, said, "Now, lady, now, remember the safety of many others is compromised, as well as your own."

Arabella closed her eyes, and a slight shudder passed over her; but she made no reply.

Sir Griffin Markham, however, took her silence for a mark of acquiescence, and going back to the foot of the ladder, exclaimed to those on deck, "Away! Set sail!" and Arabella turned round upon the couch and deluged it with tears.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WE must now turn to the events which were taking place in the City of London on the same day, but a little before the hour at which the Lady Arabella made her escape from the house of Mr. Conyers.

Anxiously William Seymour had counted every moment during that morning, till he saw at length a large cart, loaded with billets of wood, enter the open space before the old palace, and slowly approach the door which led to the apartments he inhabited. He had nobody with him, and descending himself to speak with the carter, he paid him for the wood, showed him where to place it; and then saying, "I will send one of my people back with you," he retired quickly to his chamber, locked the door, and began hastily to change his dress. The entire suit of a common mechanic had been already prepared for him, and was soon put on, making a great change in his figure and appearance; but a quantity of jet black hair had been also provided, which, with a beard of the same colour, skilfully managed by the hands of a French artist for some of the mummings of the court, completed his disguise.

By the time that all this was arranged, the wood was loaded; and, going down, he addressed the carter, saying, "Now, my man, you had better move away, they will not let you stay here long."

"The gentleman told me he would send down one of his people," replied the man.

"Well, I am one of his people," answered Seymour.

"What do you want? A draught of beer, I suppose? but we have none here for you in the Tower. There's a groat for you, however, to buy some beer."

The man took the money, whipped his horses, and moved dully on at their head, while Seymour, leaning his hand on the back part of the cart, followed, as if he was one of those attached to it. Proceeding at a slow pace onward, they soon reached the great western gate of the Tower, where no question was asked, and the cart, with those who accompanied it, was suffered to go out, though two or three persons belonging to the fortress, and a guard, were under the archway at the time. The carter then turned along the Tower wharf, but perversely stopped for a minute to speak a word to one of the warders at the south gate as he passed.

Seymour, however, though we must not say he felt no alarm, continued carelessly to lean on the back of the vehicle, till the man had done, and then followed as before, saying a word to him from time to time, to keep up the appearance of companionship. The last point of danger was the iron gate at the other end of the wharf; but it was opened to let them out without inquiry, and in a moment after the prisoner felt himself a free man again.

He was scarcely in the open street, when a gay-looking gentleman touched him on the arm, saying aloud, "Hollo, my man, are you not one of Mr. Seymour's people?"

"I am Lord Beauchamp's cooper, sir," answered Seymour, with a low bow. "Sir George Rodney, I think?"

"Yes," replied the knight; "I want to speak with you, my good fellow; come hither with me."

"I must go," said Seymour, addressing the carter; "good afternoon, comrade;" and, following Rodney, he hurried on through a number of narrow streets to a good-sized house on the other side of Tower Hill. The door was instantly opened to receive him; and, a moment after, Sir Harry West embraced him joyfully, exclaiming, "Welcome, welcome, my dear William! your brother is within there. Take a hasty farewell, and let us go."

"The boat is not come up," said Rodney.

"Where is Lady Arabella?" asked Seymour; "where is my dear wife?"

"On her way to Leigh by this time," answered Sir Harry West; "at least so I hope and trust. Run down, and see for the boat, Sir George. For Heaven's sake, let us not lose time!"

"I will be back ere you can wink," replied Rodney; and while he was gone, Seymour proceeded to a small room, where his friends and relations were assembled.

While they were still in the midst of their congratulations, Sir George Rodney returned, saying the boat was ready, but that some of the yeomen of the guard were walking about suspiciously upon Tower Hill.

"Let me see, let me see!" exclaimed Sir Harry West; and he and Rodney went to the door, with one of the servants who was in their confidence.

In an instant he returned, however, saying that the men were merely lounging about; and, taking leave of his friends, Seymour issued forth with the servant we have mentioned, whose garb harmonized better with the disguise he wore than the dress of Rodney and the old knight.

The two gentlemen followed only a step behind; but, ere they had gone thirty yards upon Tower Hill, and just as they were passing a party comprising two men, one walking on either side of a young and lady-like woman, a quick cry burst from the girl's lips, and she darted toward Sir Harry West.

The two men caught her instantly by the arm; but at the same moment the old knight threw himself directly in their way, exclaiming, "It is Ida Mara!"

"Quick, quick!" said Rodney, in a low voice, to the servant; "take him into the tobacconist's on the other side of the hill. We will be with you in a minute;" and while Seymour, after whispering, "See to her safety—see to her safety, for Heaven's sake," hurried on to a house which then stood a little beyond the spot where the Royal Mint now appears, Rodney returned to the old knight, between whom and the men that were holding Ida Mara, high and angry words were now passing.

"I tell you we have the King's orders," said one of the two; "interrupt us if you dare!"

"I certainly shall dare," replied Sir Harry; "for I believe you to be uttering a gross falsehood, sir. You are not one of the King's servants, I know; and it is but a fortnight ago since I saw you drawing cold iron upon a servant who was accompanying this very young gentleman. Aid me, Rodney, to apprehend these men."

"Take care," whispered Rodney; "you will have the guard up."

"I fear there's no other course," answered Sir Harry, quickly; "we must act boldly."

"Have with you, then," cried Rodney; and turning to the men, who were whispering together, without losing their hold of Ida Mara, he exclaimed, "Will you set the lady free, curs; or must I make the sun shine through you?" and he laid his hand upon his sword.

At that moment, however, three of the stout yeomen of the guard were seen coming from the gate towards them; and, perceiving that there was no other resource, Sir Harry West called to them, and beckoned with his hand. The yeomen instantly began to run, and the old knight, as they approached, exclaimed, "Here, guard! guard! These men are using the King's name on a false pretence."

"What is the matter—what is the matter?" cried a warder, who was at their head. "We will have no tumults on Tower Hill."

"The matter is," replied Sir Harry West, "that these two men are detaining this young gentlewoman against her will, pretending that they have the King's orders. Now, I am sure that is false. Look at that fellow's face, how white it turns at the very sight of the yeomen of the guard; and this other man I know for the servant of a quack impostor here about town."

"If it be so," said the burly warder, in a rough tone, "we will souse them in the river; but we must carry them before the Lieutenant first. Lay hands on them, my men; and you, sir, come along with us too; for we must have proof against them."

"That man's face is proof enough," replied Sir Harry West, hesitating, "and I was going with this gentleman on business of importance."

"See, see!" cried one of the men, who had been holding Ida Mara; "he is afraid to make good his charge. He knows he cannot do it."

"Well, I will go," answered Sir Harry West. "Rodney you must proceed and finish the business alone. You can speak my sentiments to the other gentlemen concerned, and explain to them the cause of my absence. I will go with you, Ida," he continued. "Do not fear. In the hands of the King's yeomen you are quite safe."

"I fear nothing when you are with me, kind Sir Harry," replied the girl.

"Come along, then," said the warder. "Sir Harry?—I wonder if you are Sir Harry West!" he continued, looking at the old knight. "I am sure you are, too. Why, I served with you, sir, in Ireland, against Tyrone. Come along, sir—come along! We'll soon settle this matter. I would take your word against a thousand;" and the whole party walked on towards the gate of the Tower.

In the meanwhile Sir George Rodney hastened to rejoin Seymour, whom he found with the servant in the shop to which they had been directed. A few rapid questions were asked by Seymour in regard to the sudden appearance

of *Ida Mara*; for, as may well be supposed, he felt some alarm respecting *Arabella* herself. Rodney, however, had been informed by Markham, that the fair Italian had been missed from *Highgate* on the day before; and, having satisfied his friend on this point, they proceeded to the water-side. But half an hour had already been lost; and when they reached the bank of the river, the boat, which had been prepared, was not to be found. After some inquiries, they entered a wherry, and rowed towards the stairs to which they were told it had been removed. But more time was thus lost, and, in all, nearly an hour and a half was consumed fruitlessly. It turned out, that the person appointed to steer the barge, a faithful but timid man, attached to the House of Hertford, had twice taken fright at some accidental events which he thought suspicious.

When, at length, he saw his young master in the boat, however, he regained confidence; and, steering boldly past a party of the Royal officers who were going from Greenwich to Whitehall by water, he guided the vessel skilfully through the shipping in the pool and down the river. The rowers plied their oars diligently; but the time which had been lost deprived them of the tide; and by the time they came opposite to Erith, it was running strong against them. Thus day broke before they reached Tilbury, and the wind, freshening and considerably agitating the water, retarded them still more. About nine o'clock, the weary rowers came in sight of Leigh; but, to their disappointment, no ship was seen at anchor there, though two or three vessels under sail were apparent at some distance.

It was now evident, both to Seymour and Rodney, that the boatmen could go no further; and, landing at Leigh, they hired a fishing-smack to convey them to a ship, which they had both fixed upon as the one that, according to the account of the people on the shore, had been lying there for two days, and had set sail about an hour before. The two gentlemen were soon embarked, and in the light boat which they had engaged, they overtook the larger and heavier vessel, still in the mouth of the river. But it proved to be merely a Dutch brig, the captain of which would alter his course for no man, and an eager consultation was held between Seymour and his friend as to what was next to be done.

"Here comes a large vessel, apparently light, and in full sail," said Rodney; "if you will take my advice, you will board her at once, and hire her, at any price, to carry you to France. The wind is fair, when once you are out of the

river ; and your friends here will let you know where to rejoin the Lady Arabella ; for she has certainly escaped, otherwise the Frenchman would not have set sail."

"That is my comfort," replied Seymour ; "that is my comfort ! She sacrificed all for me ; and, knowing that she is safe, I care little what fate befalls myself."

The plan proposed by the knight was accordingly adopted. The vessel towards which they now directed their course proved to be a collier returning to Newcastle ; and, for the sum of forty pounds, the skipper consented to land Mr. Seymour on the French coast.

Taking leave of Rodney, then, with many expressions of gratitude, the fugitive bade adieu to the shores of England, not to return for years. The day was beautiful, the wind was fair and strong, and before evening the faint white cliffs of France were visible over the blue sea, spreading wider and wider as the ship sailed along. Shortly after, the distant sound of a cannon struck the ears of those on board ; and Seymour asked, "What can that be ? The day is fine, the wind not high,—it cannot be a signal of distress !"

"It may be, sir," answered the master ; "at sea there is no knowing when an accident may happen."

But another, and another gun was heard, and then came a short pause ; after which three more were fired in rapid succession ; and Seymour, gazing anxiously from the stern, perceived some vessels, at the distance of seven or eight miles, in the direction of Pegwell Bay, with a wreath of white smoke streaming from the farthest of them. The next instant a flash crossed the cloud, and then a second ; and after the lapse of some short time, the report of cannon was again heard. The smoke now nearly concealed the ships, but, to the number of thirteen times, the same sounds reached the fugitive's ear ; and then all was still again.

His heart was ill at ease. He would fain have persuaded himself that the event which gave him so much anxiety must be caused by some accidental circumstance, unconnected with the fate of her who had sacrificed so much for him ; that Arabella must near that period have well nigh reached the French coast ; but apprehension, more strong than argument, would not be stilled, and, sitting down by the helm, he buried his eyes in his hands.

He felt then,—whatever joy he might experience at his own escape—that the best right of man, the best gift of earth, was poor without her he loved,—that liberty itself was nothing without Arabella !

CHAPTER XL.

WE must now return for a time to the party which we left upon Tower Hill. The warder and Sir Harry West walked on talking together, with poor Ida Mara keeping close to the knight's side, till they were within about thirty yards of the gate of the Tower. Then, however, a slight noise behind caused the good soldier to turn round, exclaiming, "Look sharp to those two men!"

But his command came too late; for at the very same moment that it was uttered, the personage who had been foremost in detaining the fair Italian, darted past the yeoman next him, and, at full speed, ran away in the direction of Petty Wales. The yeoman gave chase, while his companion seized the collar of the other man; but the pursuit was vain, for, embarrassed by his somewhat cumbersome clothing, and being rather fat and pursy withal, the soldier lost ground every minute, and the fugitive disappeared amidst the lanes and alleys, to which he directed his steps.

In the meanwhile, the other man was dragged into the Tower by the neck; and the good old knight, following with Ida Mara, desired to see the Lieutenant as speedily as possible, in order to ensure her liberation. While the warder was gone for that purpose, Sir Harry West inquired in a whisper, whether Ida really thought that the people, in whose hands he found her, had authority from the King.

"I know not, indeed," she replied; "they always told me they had; but I cannot help thinking that, if it were so, they would have brought me before him yesterday. Instead of that, they took me to a lonely house on a heath, which I heard them call Hampstead, and there they kept me locked up till this morning. They then brought me down into the town, and kept me for an hour in a house out in that direction," and she pointed eastward with her hand, "where a woman, dressed in very fine clothes, came and looked at me, but said nothing, and went away again. After that, I was told they must take me to Whitehall; and they were carrying me along thither, when I saw you; and I think," she added, in a lower tone, "Mr. Seymour, too."

"Hush!" said the knight; "not a word of that;" and

as he was still speaking, the warder returned to conduct him to the Lieutenant's lodging.

The man who had been kept without, in the porch of the gateward tower, was ordered to follow, with a yeoman to guard him; and making Ida Mara, who seemed weary and faint, lean upon his arm, Sir Harry accompanied the warder between the walls, and was soon in the presence of Wade, the Lieutenant.

That officer, at the first mention of Sir Harry's name, had ordered him to be admitted, though he was in conversation at the time with a gentleman from the court, who had come upon the pretence of paying a visit to Mr. Seymour, but in reality to smooth down the irritated feelings of the Lieutenant, and induce him to resign his post quietly, without calling attention to the transaction by remonstrance or resistance. A servant had been sent to the apartments of Seymour, to know whether he would admit Sir Charles Warner to speak with him; and the man returned, almost at the same moment that the good old knight and his fair companion entered the Lieutenant's room.

Sir Harry might perhaps have felt a little alarmed, if he had known the servant's errand; but the first words he heard were: "I have been to Mr. Seymour's, sir, and there saw one of his gentlemen, who says that his master is in bed with a raging headache, and cannot see any one; he would not even go in to tell him."

"Oh! never mind, never mind," replied Warner; "I will see him another day—Master Lieutenant, I will wait a little till you have dispatched this other business, for our conversation was growing interesting. Good morning, Sir Harry West."

"To me extremely so, sir," answered the Lieutenant. "Sir Harry, I am your humble servant. What is this affair the warder tells me of? Pray be seated, young lady. The case does not seem to come within my cognizance."

"It is simply this, sir," replied the old knight. "This young lady I have long known, and dearly love, as to her I owe my life, she having nursed me through the plague some years ago. She is now a gentlewoman attending on the Lady Arabella Seymour; and on crossing Tower Hill but now, I met her, hurried along against her will by two men, one of whom I know to be the servant of a rank impostor and conjuror, one Doctor Foreman."

"Oh! I have seen him," replied the Lieutenant; "he is a knave, if ever there was one."

"Ay, and has many ways of knavery," said Warner

"the report goes, that many have suffered from his practices."

"But what excuse do the men urge," asked the Lieutenant, "for using this violence to the lady?"

"They say they are commanded by the King to bring her before him," answered Sir Harry West.

"I never said so," exclaimed the man, who was standing guarded by a yeoman near the door; "my comrade did, and so he told me, too."

"But where did they first lay hands upon the lady, and when?" asked the Lieutenant, looking towards Ida Mara.

"It was yesterday, somewhat before noon," she replied, in her sweet musical Italian voice. "I had gone out for a short time from Mr. Conyers' house, where the Lady Arabella now lodges, to walk amidst the lanes in the neighbourhood, when these two men, with a third, whom I did not well see, though I think I know him, seized upon me suddenly, and, saying that it was in the King's name, carried me to a place called Hampstead; where, in the midst of a wide heath, close by a deep wood, they placed me in a lonely house, and kept me all the day. I demanded to be brought immediately before the King, but they only laughed at me; and when I would not eat the food they brought, they said that hunger would soon teach me better."

"And why would you not eat, may I ask?" said the Lieutenant.

"Because I was afraid of poison," answered Ida Mara. "The man who I think was with them, is one named Weston, who I know deals in such drugs, and, I fear, fatally."

"Why, that was Weston who was with me just now," exclaimed the fellow at the door. "Some say he is Dr. Foreman's son, and some his nephew."

"And do you pretend," asked the Lieutenant, "that you have any commission from the King?"

"Not I, sir," replied the man; "'twas Weston said so, and he told me the same story, engaging me to go with him, and promising me a noble for my reward."

"The case seems very clear," said the Lieutenant; "the King would never employ such instruments as these; and I think, Sir Harry, that I had better keep the fellow for the stocks, and send the gentlewoman away with you."

"It were the more prudent course," said Warner interposing, "to convey them both to the King. His Majesty's name having been used, we cannot take upon ourselves to induce what people he, in his wisdom, may think fit to em-

play; and as the other man, it seems, is no longer here, from what the warder said, to answer for himself, none is so fit to investigate the matter as his Majesty."

"Of course, of course," said the Lieutenant; "and as your reasons seem to me just, Sir Charles, I think I must act upon them.—Do you not think so, Sir Harry West?"

"That you must decide yourself," replied Sir Harry; "but if such be your determination, I will ask you to wait for half an hour, till I can send two of my own men to accompany this fair lady to the court, and guard her back to my house, in case the King should not detain her at the palace; for I have myself business which takes me in a different direction."

"I must return to Highgate with all speed, dear Sir Harry," exclaimed Ida Mara; "the Lady Arabella will, I know, be alarmed at my long absence."

The old knight mused, and then answered, "It will be too late to return to-night; but I will let the lady know that you are safe, as soon as letter or messenger can reach her. But you will need refreshment, too, my poor child?"

"That she shall have while waiting for your men," replied the Lieutenant; "and fatherly care, depend upon it. Come, fair lady, I will take you to good Mrs. Wade, my maiden sister, who has a tender compassion for all distressed damsels, and will show you all kindness and courtesy."

"The servants shall be here with all speed," said Sir Harry, rising. "Farewell, my dear child; we shall meet again, I trust, ere night. Then you shall tell me more of your adventures."

The Lieutenant, according to his word, led poor Ida Mara to his sister, who fulfilled his promise of showing her kindness; and, about half an hour after, she was placed in a boat, with good Matthew Lakyn and another servant of Sir Harry West's, as well as a yeoman of the guard, and the man who had remained in custody. It took them near an hour to reach Whitehall, for the tide had not yet turned in their favour; and the fair Italian was kept waiting for an equal space of time in a corridor, exposed to the gaze of all the passers-by, and to the coarse observations of several of them.

At length, however, an usher approached with a rapid but silent step, and told her to follow to the presence of the King. She found the monarch in his closet with several gentlemen, some of whom she knew by sight, while the rest were strangers to her. Accustomed as she had been for some years to see the monarch daily, Ida Mara easily judged that he was in no very placable humour, by the

way in which he moved about in his chair, and lolled his tongue out of his mouth.

"What's this, my woman, what's this?" he said, when she appeared. "No sooner have we done with one pothier about the Lady Arabella, our headstrong kinswoman, than there comes another. Our Lieutenant at the Tower sends us word that you have been carried off forcibly from Highgate. What did these fellows say?"

"That it was by your majesty's commands," replied Ida Mara, "and consequently I obeyed implicitly."

"The condemned liars!" cried the King; "but you did right, lassie; you did right. What may this mean, my Lord Northampton? Why should any two men seek to carry off this young gentlewoman, and use our name to further their purposes?"

"In truth, sire," replied the Earl, "if your majesty's keen judgment does not perceive the cause, it is vain for me to seek it; but I cannot help thinking that the King has already judged of the matter, and inquires but to show our want of skill."

"We have an inkling, we have an inkling," answered James, laughing, "and will send off to Highgate this very afternoon. Tell me, pretty mistress, have you ever given the Lady Arabella any offence?"

"None, may it please your majesty," replied Ida Mara, eagerly. "I have ever striven to serve her faithfully and well, owing her my first duty, after God and your majesty."

"Ay, but," demanded the King, "may she not think, that your first duty was owing to her, before God and myself?"

"I trust not, sire; I trust not," replied Ida Mara, timidly, and not knowing what was to come next. "I have always heard the Lady Arabella express herself most submissively towards your majesty."

"That's right, that's right," said the King; "submission in words is something, but we must have submission in deeds too, before we grant favour. And so, she never complained to you of the restraint to which we have thought it right, for her own good and that of the state, to subject her?"

"Never, sire," replied Ida Mara, simply; "I have seen her weep often; but never heard her complain."

"That's right, that's right," repeated James; "but yet it's just possible, mistress, that she may have been deceiving you."

"Oh, no," cried Ida Mara, with the blood mounting to

her check. "I do not think that she is capable of deceiving any one."

"We shall see, we shall see," answered the King. "And so these men told you that I had commanded them to seize you. When was this, lassie?"

"Yesterday morning, towards noon," replied Ida Mara, "and they persisted in the same story to-day, when I met Sir Harry West on Tower Hill, and asked his protection."

"And what did Sir Harry reply to them?" demanded James. "He is a wise man, Sir Harry West, and not that unlearned in the humane letters. He expounded one night a passage of the Italian poet, Dante, without having heard an opinion upon the subject, in a manner quite conformable to our own, and thereby put to shame a gentleman of that country, who insisted upon it, in spite of our expressed opinion, to which he might have reasonably bowed, that there was no latent or hidden meaning in the poet's words, but a mere open and plain poetical figure. What said the knight, I ask?"

"He said," replied Ida Mara, "that he was sure your majesty would never use such instruments as they were, and he called up some of the yeomen of the guard, who were standing before the gate, and placed us all under their charge."

"The knight was right in fact, but wrong in inference," answered the King; "we did not employ the men; but there is no telling what instruments kings may sometimes see fit to use. That their own wisdom must decide. Then, again, as to his conduct, Sir Harry displayed his skill and judgment in a manner that deserves our approbation. Had he taken upon him to deliver you with his own hand, besides the chance of brawling, which is always an offence, he might have trespassed unwittingly on his duty to us. But, in placing the matter in the hands of our officers, he could not go wrong."

"It seems to me, sire," said the Earl of Northampton, "that these men, who have dared to use your majesty's sacred name in an unlawful manner, must lose their ears. I look upon this to be a very great offence."

"Of that there can be no doubt," replied the King; "but we will confront the man they have caught with this young gentlewoman, and hear what he has to say. Let the fellow be brought hither."

The King's orders were immediately obeyed; and the personage who had aided in carrying off Ida Mara from Highgate was brought, white and trembling, into the King's presence. He was subjected by James himself to a very

close and keen examination; but he persisted in the story he had told the Lieutenant of the Tower, saying, that the man by whom he had been employed assured him that it was by the King's commands, and declaring that he knew nothing further on the subject. He acknowledged, indeed, that what Ida Mara had said was correct in all points, but protested that nothing could be further from his thoughts than to use the King's name unauthorised.

When questioned as to the name and character of his employer, he hesitated a little, but at length mentioned again the name of Weston, adding, that he was attached to Doctor Foreman, the celebrated Physician and *Naturalist*,—for such was the term which the charlatan thought fit to apply to his more secret avocations, though he certainly used it in a sense very different from that which is attached to it at present.

The name of Doctor Foreman, however, created a little confusion in the King's closet. Lord Rochester and the Earl of Northampton whispered together for a moment behind the monarch's chair; and Rochester then addressed a few words to James himself, in an undertone.

"Ay, what, are you there?" exclaimed James; "have you only just arrived at it? I saw the matter from the beginning. This young gentlewoman did not serve the people's turn, to carry on their correspondences and communications; and so they have had her removed. But the lady shall to Durham to-morrow, if I am a crowned King; and you, my pretty mistress, shall be restored to her, with such other maids as she shall choose, knowing right well how to select those that will be faithful and true, and not plotters and contrivers. Who is that knocking at the door? See, Carro! We will not have any one admitted just now."

Lord Rochester quitted the closet for a moment, and then returned with a face full of consternation.

"Mr. Conyers, may it please your majesty," he said, "is waiting without. I have not spoken to him, but the page says he is in dreadful agitation, on account of the Lady Arabella's escape."

"Ha! how! what!" exclaimed the King. "Her escape! Body o' me! Call him in, call him in. How now, sir?" he continued, as Mr. Conyers appeared, with strong marks of emotion on his countenance. "What's your news?"

"Such as I hardly dare to communicate, sire," replied Mr. Conyers, "though I have ridden post-haste to tell them. On my return to Highgate, after paying my respects to your majesty, I found that—almost all the people of the

house having been sent out of the way during my absence, upon one pretence or another—the Lady Arabella had made her escape.”

“I told you so! I told you so!” exclaimed James: “the carrying off this girl was the first step. This is a deep-laid conspiracy—a plot as detestable as that of the Papists. Send for Cecil immediately—send for Cecil. Let the council be summoned within an hour. My Lords, we must look to the safety of the state! There is no knowing where this may end. We shall have a rebellion. If such a firebrand as this kinswoman of ours falls into the hands of foreign potentates, what is to become of us?”

The confusion which now took place in the royal closet was beyond description. All order and regularity was lost in a moment. Every one talked to his neighbour. Very little real reverence was shown to the King. Some shrugged their shoulders and turned up their eyes; and James himself was in the most pitiable state of agitation. He relieved himself at length by five or six horrible oaths; and then, with difficulty obtaining silence, he addressed Mr. Conyers in an angry tone, interrupting his speech to that gentleman from time to time, to make some observation to his favourite, or those around.

“Sir,” he said, “you have betrayed our confidence, and misused our trust.—Have you sent for Cecil, my Lord Northampton?—If you had been vigilant, sir, this could not have happened. You do not know the consequences, sir, of what has taken place.—The ~~evil~~ ^{evil} is in these women, Carro; they are always making mischief, and there is never any telling where it will stop.—You should have given us information of the first suspicious circumstance.”

“I saw none, your majesty,” replied Mr. Conyers, boldly.

“Don’t interrupt us, sir,” exclaimed the King; “there are some men that have no eyes to see with, and some that do not choose to use them when they have got them. Now, I’ll warrant you that you have come away without any clue to this mystery. My Lord Northampton, send off directly to the Tower and order that young ne’er-do-well, William Seymour, to be put in close confinement;” and he added a coarse allusion to the probability of children springing from the marriage of that gentleman with Arabella.

“Well, sir,” he proceeded, turning to Mr. Conyers again, “have you any clue, I say?—I’ll wager now you have come away without any precaution at all, just to give the girl time to escape.”

“No, sire,” replied Mr. Conyers, “though I thought

my first duty was to make known to your majesty what had taken place during my absence, I took care, while my horse was being brought, to give orders for immediate pursuit in every direction; and very probably before I return the Lady Arabella may have been brought back, or, at all events, information may have been obtained as to what course she has taken.

"Go and see—go and see," cried the King, "and let us have instant tidings of what you discover. Present yourself to-morrow at ten before the council, and bring all whom you may judge to have participated in this conspiracy along with you. Call a clerk, my Lord of Rochester; we will ourselves immediately dictate a proclamation."

"What is to be done with this young gentlewoman, sire?" asked the Earl of Northampton.

"Grey and Bradshaw will be very happy to take care of her," said Lord Rochester; "they have long wanted an opportunity of showing her their devotion."

"Hout, hold your silly tongue, with your gibing," cried James; "this is a serious affair, young man. Where can the girl be bestowed, Northampton?"

"May it please your majesty," said Ida Mara. "I would fain retire to the house of Sir Harry West, who is my first friend in this country. I can then wait your majesty's commands, if you should have anything else to require of me."

"That is right; that is right," replied James; "you are a wise and well-spoken young woman, and shall not be forgotten. The very fact of their having you conveyed out of the way, when the conspirators were about to execute the plot, is a proof that you did your duty faithfully to your King. You may retire. Now, send that man to the Fleet. By God's will, he shall stand on the pillory, unless he makes full confession. Hold your tongue, sir! We have no time to deal with you now. Sit down there, master clerk, and write."

The King then proceeded to dictate a proclamation, which was afterwards modified by the advice of Cecil, but which in the first draft displayed, in a most ludicrous manner, the trepidation into which he was thrown by Arabella's escape. He worked himself into the belief, and even contrived to impress the same idea upon the minds of most of his councillors, that the flight of his kinswoman, instead of being the mere effect of her attachment to her husband, originated in some dark and sinister design against his throne and family. His excited imagination pictured her throwing herself into the arms of some inimical power, and,

supported by fleets and armies, contesting with him the Crown of England. He saw Papists and Protestants alike in revolt against his authority, rebellion spreading over the land, and his very person in danger. In fact, all the wild images that could suggest themselves to the mind of a weak, cowardly, and tyrannical prince, rose up before him in an instant, and displayed their effect in every word and action.

Nor did his terrors fail to be greatly increased when information was brought from the Tower, that William Seymour was no longer to be found within its walls; and the whole court was in a state of movement and agitation during the greater part of that night and the succeeding morning. Letters were despatched to every port of the kingdom, with orders to stop the fugitives, and to send out vessels for their pursuit, if already at sea. Each of these despatches was marked with the superscription, common in those days on occasions of great importance, "With haste—post haste! Ride for your life—your life!" And one of them, still in existence, bears the figure of a gallows and a halter, as an emblem of the King's wrath against any one who should dare to disobey.

CHAPTER XLI.

It is a strange and terrible ordination that the vices and passions, the follies and prejudices, the wickedness and the iniquity of man, which run in threads through the whole web of society, spoiling a fair and otherwise beautiful fabric, should chequer the fate of the most virtuous and good with the dark lines of sorrow and misfortune, and that, in this strangely constituted world, the best feelings of the best hearts, operated upon by the baseness of others, should be very frequently the causes of disaster and distress to those who, if this earth were the soul's abiding-place, might claim the brightest lot that falls to the portion of humanity.

After leaving the mouth of the river, and rounding the North Foreland, the Lady Arabella, somewhat recovered from the first effects of disappointment, came upon deck, and stood for a few minutes gazing over the world of waters. The wind, which had not been very favourable for their course down the river, was now all that could be

desired ; but Arabella, anxious for Seymour's safety, first expressed a wish, and then entreated eagerly, that the captain would lay-to for a short time, to afford a chance of the arrival of her husband.

The master, now free from the river, was willing to accede to her wishes ; and even her attendants, who had recovered from their apprehensions, did not offer any opposition. Towards evening, however, as the expected boat did not appear, it was determined once more to sail on towards Calais ; and the execution of this resolution was carried on more eagerly, as a ship, then called a pinnace, but which would now be called a sloop, was seen drawing towards them, with the royal flag displayed. Scarcely were they under sail, however, when the pinnace fired a shot across their bows, as a signal to bring-to.

" Ay, I thought so," cried the captain, with a loud oath, in his native tongue ; " this comes of losing time. Go down below, lady—go down below ; your presence only cumbers us here. We shall reach Calais before them yet."

" Oh, for heaven's sake, make all sail," replied Arabella.

" Be you sure I will do that," replied the man ; " she shall stick out every inch of canvas she can carry. But go you down, and don't be afraid ;" and he turned to give orders to his crew.

The ship sailed on with all the speed that she could command ; but, though by no means a slow vessel, the pinnace gained perceptibly upon her, and the only hope was that they might be enabled to reach the French coast before the English vessel actually came up with them.

In the meantime, Arabella went down into the cabin, and leaning her head upon her hand, gave herself up to every sort of melancholy anticipation. The women-servants, who had been sent to accompany her, were well-nigh strangers to her, and she had no one to whom she could venture to display all the sorrowful feelings of her heart. The only comfort that she felt was the rippling sound of the waves, as the ship passed through them ; but the hope of escape was faint, even though she felt that they were going with tremendous speed. Her spirit was one that had never through life indulged in sanguine expectations ; and with her brightest and most cheerful feelings there had always mingled a shade of melancholy, as if she were forewarned by some internal voice of the sad fate before her.

The rapid rate at which the vessel went, the eager cries of the person in command, the plunging of the ship, as

she passed wave after wave, for several minutes did, indeed, afford to the unfortunate lady some hope of reaching the coast which she had seen in the faint distance from the deck; but she was not permitted long to indulge in such anticipations.

The report of a cannon soon reached her ear; another and another followed. Still, however, the ship sailed on, and no sounds from above, but the mere word of command, gave notice that the danger was increased. A pause ensued; and then again the cannon were heard, she thought, more distinctly. Still no unusual bustle displayed itself on deck; and one of her women, looking through the small window in the stern, remarked, in a low voice, that the pinnacle seemed more distant.

A moment after a single gun was fired; and though there had been some noise above previously, deep silence instantly succeeded. Immediately after a rattling sound and a heavy fall upon the deck were heard, followed by cries, and shouts, and exclamations; but the ship continued on her course, and one of the servants coming in, informed Arabella that a shot from the pinnacle had struck the boat upon the deck, but had done no farther mischief.

"It would be better for them to strike," she murmured. "What should I feel if any of them were killed on my account? Better linger out my life in prison than be the cause of bloodshed."

"The captain says we shall get to Calais yet, lady," replied the man.

"God send it!" she answered; and as she spoke, the guns of the pinnacle were again heard.

The next instant the little vessel shook, as something struck her; and, tearing through the wood-work of the cabin, and casting splinters far and wide, came a ball, which passed within a few feet of the lady, and entered a beam beyond her. Arabella did not start or shrink, for she had no fears for herself; but it seemed evident that the pursuers were drawing nearer, and she was terrified for her companions. Rapid steps now came down the ladder, and the captain of the ship ran in and gazed around.

"Go forward, lady," he said; "go forward into that little room; you will be safer there. Come, every one lend a hand, and pile up some hammocks round the side."

"Do you think you can outsail them?" asked Arabella.

"I hope so, lady," he replied. "At all events, I will try."

"Strike when you like," said Arabella, "without con-

sidering me. I would not have you risk yourself and your men on my account."

"Thank you, lady, thank you," answered the seaman. "We will risk ourselves none the less for what you say, and strike I will not till I am compelled. They have no right to fire at a ship of a friendly country, and our King will have vengeance for such conduct."

Thus saying, he left her; and though the guns of the pinnace were fired from time to time, no other event occurred for near a quarter of an hour, when a tremendous crash was heard. The little vessel heeled suddenly; and a rattling sound of falling timber and cordage showed that some of the masts or yards had been carried away. Three or four minutes elapsed, while all eyes in the cabin were fixed anxiously upon the door, and the rate of the ship visibly diminished.

At length the captain of the vessel entered, with a sad and gloomy countenance. "It's no use, lady, to try it any longer," he said; "they have carried away our topmast; and we have no chance now. I have done the best for you that I could, but it is vain. Have I your consent to heave-to?"

"At once," answered Arabella; "do not let them fire at you again. Make them some signal, my good friend. Now for my prison again," she murmured, as the captain left her. "I have never yet known hope but to be disappointed;" and, bending down her head, she pressed her handkerchief upon her eyes, while a low struggling sob or two told that she was weeping, but strove to restrain her tears.

In a few minutes she had overcome her emotion, and, wiping her eyes, sat calmly, till the sound of many voices speaking on the deck, and at the side of the vessel, showed her that a boat from the pinnace was alongside. After a short pause, steps were again heard coming down, and an English gentleman appeared, completely armed, as was the custom of that age.

"The Lady Arabella Stuart?" he said, advancing into the cabin, and gazing around.

"My name is Arabella Seymour, sir," answered the lady; "but I suppose you mean myself."

"I do, madam," he replied; "and I regret to say that my orders are to land you and convey you to London, as a prisoner. But before I do so, I must beg you to answer me truly, whether Mr. Seymour be on board?"

Arabella started, and looked up, with an expression of joy.

"He has escaped, then!" she cried; "he has escaped! Thank God, thank God! Pardon me, Lord, for murmuring at thy will! He has escaped, and I am happy."

"Then I am to conclude, madam," said the officer, "that he is not on board this ship?"

"Most assuredly he is not," replied Arabella; "of that I pledge you my word. I trust that by this time he is safe in France."

"No one can tell, madam," was the answer; "he had escaped from the Tower; but to escape from the country is another affair."

The only bitter thing that Arabella probably ever said in her life now rose to her lips. "I know it is," she replied; "it seems as if England had become one great prison." And the chill which the officer's words cast upon the hopes that she had entertained of her husband's escape depressed her more even than her own re-capture.

The ship was immediately taken into port, but all things seemed now indifferent to her. Her mind, agitated by the past, uncertain at the present, apprehensive of the future, became bewildered and confused. She suffered those who were around her to do with her what they would; and, during that evening and the following day, she appeared to be in a dream, painful and terrible, but indistinct and misty. Nor was it till she found herself passing the gloomy portals of the Tower, that she awakened to all the stern reality of her fate. Then she burst into tears again, and a cold shudder passed over her frame, as she gazed around upon the grey walls which had witnessed the sorrows and the death of so many of her race.

The next morning early, she was hurried before the council, and subjected to all the anguish of public examination and reproof, which not even her gentleness could mitigate. But as she left the council-chamber, to return to her sad captivity in the Tower, some friendly heart afforded her the greatest alleviation that her grief could receive. In passing through the mixed crowd that filled the corridor, one of the persons present, she could not distinguish whom, whispered in haste, "Mr. Seymour has arrived safe in France!"

Arabella started, and turned round; but, hurried on by those who guarded her, she was unable to see any familiar face among the crowd; and, uttering the words "Thank God!" she proceeded on her way.

On that one thought she pondered during the rest of the day, speaking little to any one, and taking little nourish-

ment, but often repeating to herself, "He is safe!—Thank God, he is safe!"

Towards nightfall she was visited by the Lieutenant of the Tower, who came to inform her that the two servants who had been captured with her were to be removed—three others, a gentlewoman, a chambermaid, and a man, having been sent to attend upon her by the King.

Arabella smiled sadly. "He need not envy me, Lieutenant," she said, "the poor comfort of seeing faces that I know. I shall have few consolations within these walls—but one, indeed; and that he cannot take from me."

"And what is that, lady, may I ask?" said the Lieutenant.

"My trust in God, sir," replied Arabella; "there are justice and mercy above, if not below. But pray let me see these people whom the King has sent; I must welcome my fellow-prisoners."

"The man, madam," answered the Lieutenant, "tells me that he was in your service at Ilighgate; but as it has been proved that he had no hand in your escape, the King has restored him to you."

"Oh, poor Cobham!" exclaimed Arabella; "I shall be glad to see him, though it is selfish, too, for he will have a dull life here."

"I trust, lady," replied the Lieutenant, "that neither he nor you will be long within these walls. The King will, I hope, be satisfied with submission, and set you at liberty ere long."

"I must not doubt it, Lieutenant," said Arabella; "for that were to accuse him of injustice. I will try to make myself as cheerful under the infliction as may be. I have heard that you are kind to your prisoners, Lieutenant, and have to thank you for your treatment of one whom I love better than myself."

"I owe a large debt of gratitude to that gentleman's house," answered the officer; "and would gladly repay it, madam, by any courtesy to you, but I shall not have the opportunity, I fear. To-morrow I am to be removed from my office, to make way for another; but he is a gentleman of good repute, and will, I trust, deal kindly with all under his care. I will now send these people to you, lady, and take my leave, wishing you happier with all my heart."

Thus saying, he quitted the room; and, in a few minutes, the door again opened. Arabella raised her eyes, with as well-contented a smile as she could assume,

to welcome her old servant Cobham ; but by the faint light that streamed through the high window, she saw another well-known form ; and, starting up, with a look of joy she cast herself upon Ida Mara's neck ; and then, overwhelmed with various emotions, burst into tears.

"Oh, Ida, Ida," she cried, "this is relief indeed!"

"Hush, dear lady," whispered Ida Mara ; "do not seem too glad to see me. Speak to Cobham and the girl. I will explain all when they are gone."

Arabella raised her head, and then saw that two of the King's officers had followed the rest of the party.

"Ah, Cobham," she said, turning to her old servant ; "I am right glad to see you all once more ;" and she held out her hand to him.

The man took and kissed it respectfully, saying aloud, "I would gladly see you anywhere but here, madam ; and if you had told me what you were going to do, I would have taken care you should not be here at all."

"No rebellious words, sirrah," said one of the officers ; "I will report them to the King."

"You may report what you like," replied the man, bluntly.

But Arabella interposed, exclaiming, "Hush ! hush ! I beseech you, sir, refrain ; if you have any of the feelings of a gentleman, you will not think of repeating, where it may do harm, the expression of a faithful servant's attachment to his unhappy mistress. Jane, I am glad to see you."

The girl replied with a discontented look, merely saying that she hoped her mistress was well, and then retired with Cobham and the King's officers to the rooms appropriated to the servants of the Lady Arabella, which were contiguous to her own.

"Alas ! dear lady," said Ida Mara, as soon as they were gone. "Alas ! to find you here ! How eagerly did I watch and inquire for any tidings respecting you ; and then, when I heard that you were taken, I trembled lest they should debar me from seeing you."

"But how came they to send you ?" asked Arabella ; "it is indeed an act of favour which I did not expect."

"Why, lady, the King has deceived himself entirely respecting me," replied the fair Italian. "It is his own doing ; for I said not one word to mislead him, though I took good care not to contradict him."

"You were wise," said Arabella ; "he is not one to bear opposition. But how came it about, my Ida ?"

The chain related to the lady all that the reader already

knows, concerning the events which happened to her after quitting Mr. Conyers' house at Highgate.

"What was their object," she said, "in taking me away I have no precise means of knowing; but I am sure I saw that dreadful man's face for a moment; and having once vowed revenge against me, I am certain that he will not fail to seek it whenever the opportunity occurs. I believed he was dead, till within the last week; for I had not seen him before for several years. But I do not think I can deceive myself now, and though the hair and beard are black instead of grey, the features are the same. But I will not dwell upon that, dear lady; the King cheated himself, as I have told you. He thought I had been carried away by order of your friends, because you could not place confidence in me; and to-day he sent for me, to ask if I would return to attend upon you while you are a prisoner in the Tower. I took care not to seem too ready, saying that I did not like imprisonment, nor the Tower for a residence; but that if it were his majesty's wish, I was ready to obey him implicitly. Thereupon he praised my submission, and assured me that I should have as much liberty as possible while here. He knew not how gladly my heart beat to have permission to come. If he had, I think he would have forbidden it."

"And can you really find joy, *Ida*?" asked the lady, "in sharing a prison with me?—Who can tell, my poor girl, how long it may last? Who can tell that I may not here end my days?"

"Oh, Heaven forbid!" cried *Ida Mara*; "we will soften these stones first with our tears."

"Alas!" replied *Arabella*, "I fear that we shall not ever be able to soften the heart of the King by any tears that we may shed. But at all events, your being with me will be an alleviation of my sorrow."

"Perhaps you may be able to escape, lady," rejoined *Ida Mara*.

"No, *Ida*, no;" answered *Arabella*; "I will not try. The net is around me, and it is of no use to flap my wings. On the contrary, I will make a voluntary promise not to escape, if they will give me the full range of my cage; and then, like many another poor bird, I will sit and sing my life away between the bars. I only grieve to think that, for my sake, you should be doomed to the same hard fate."

Ida Mara kissed the lady's hand, and gazed in her face, with a look of deep sadness; but she only replied, "You forget, madam, that imprisonment to me is not what it is

to you. I have nothing in the world without to sigh for. Oh, that they would but keep me and let you go!"

Arabella answered by her tears.

CHAPTER XLII.

NEVER did human being, in a world of woe, strive with more patient perseverance for contentment with his lot than did poor Arabella Seymour. She called to her aid all the resources of a humble and a faithful spirit. She trusted in God, she resigned herself to his will, she tried to bear the chastening hand with cheerfulness; but it was in vain she did so. Hours, days, weeks passed,—the heavy hours, days, weeks of imprisonment, without one hope coming to lighten the burden or assuage the pangs.

At first, she consoled herself with the knowledge that Seymour was safe beyond the power of the vain tyrant who kept her within those walls; but she soon found that even that consolation, when she indulged in it, produced an evil effect upon her mind. The thought that he was secure and free, brought with it the eager yearnings of a warm and affectionate heart to be with him, to rest upon the bosom of him she loved, to hear the music of his voice, to see his eyes beaming upon her with tenderness and devotion.

She dared not trust herself with such meditations, for they were dangerous to her tranquillity, and were sure to end in long and bitter weeping. Then she strove to extract hope from some fruitless effort to soften the cold and obdurate heart of the King,—as the alchemists of the day attempted to draw gold from lead or iron. But yet, even in the act, she knew it to be idle. She would gaze upon the letter she had written, beseeching this person or that, who was supposed to have influence over James, to intercede for her; and with a sad smile, shake her head and sigh, exclaiming, "Vain, vain! it is all in vain."

Then she would wander round the walls of the Tower, gaze on the busy multitudes swarming freely without, picture to herself their thoughts, feelings, and occupations; trace them, in her imagination, through their daily labour, and follow them back again to the home of domestic love; and the tears would rise in her eyes, as she thought that no such home was ever to be hers.

Or, at other times, she would turn towards the river with its shipping, and mark the light boats gliding over the waters, and long—oh, with what a thirsty longing!—to pursue the course of that stream once more, and over the wide sea, to find the free happiness denied her there; and when she looked around on bars, and gates, and guards, her heart would feel chilled and crushed; and again her tears would rise, and drop upon the stones of the wall.

Often, when such was the case, some words which had been used by Ida Mara came back to her mind; and she would ponder on them, and turn them in her imagination a thousand ways; for sadness ever will sport with fancy, and misery often dances in her chains.

One day, as she was sitting in her chamber, with the fair Italian beside her singing to her, she wrote from time to time a word or two on some paper which lay upon the table; and when the girl's song was done, she said, "Give me your instrument, Ida; I will sing you a song now;" and placing the paper upright before her, she proceeded to pour forth to a simple air of the time, the lines she had just written.

SONG.

"Ye gloomy walls, that circling round,
Oppress this form of clay,
When shall my spirit spurn the bound
Harsh men around it lay?
Oh! were there power in tears,
Shed through unnumbered years,
To soften the hard stone,
Long ere this weary day,
Melting like snow away,
Ye to the dust had gone.

"Lo! wreathing round your hoary towers,
Those who lie cold beneath,
Entwine a coronal of flowers
And honour you in death.
Though were there power in tears,
Dropp'd through unnumbered years,
To soften the hard stone,
The torrents that the dead
Within these walls have shed,
Had of those towers left none!

"But all in vain, my heart would fly,
Wide o'er the land and wave,
To scenes of life and liberty
From this its prison grave.

No! there's no power in tears,
 Shed through unnumbered years,
 To soften the hard stone.
 Else would I weep all day
 And cease only to pray,
 Till ye to dust were gone.

"But colder than these iron walls,
 Hardest of earthly things,
 Is that which dwells in courtly halls
 Within the breast of kings.
 Though there were power in tears,
 Shed through unnumbered years,
 To soften the hard stone,
 There, fruitless would they prove!
 Grief has no power to move
 The heart of man alone."

"Now run away, Ida, and fetch me a book," said Arabella; "I must not let such thoughts stir within me any more; they render me discontented, dear girl; and, they say, a contented heart makes a garden of a wilderness."

"Ay, dear lady," answered Ida Mara, with a sigh, "but it is hard work first plucking up the thorns. You have no books but those you have read often;—which shall I bring you?"

"Run to Sir Gervase Elways," said Arabella, "and ask him to lend me something new. He is a learned man, and very complaisant, and I know amuses the tediousness of his charge with much reading. A blessing on those who write for us! How many a heavy heart is lightened by reading the tales of other men's endurance; how many a sick bed is smoothed by the light hand of gentle poetry! Good faith, Ida—as it must be for one or the other—I would rather weep for the gone-by sorrows of other people than for my own, too truly present."

Ida Mara left her mistress to obey; but, in a moment after, she came back pale and trembling.

"What is the matter, Ida? what is the matter?" cried the lady, starting up.

"Ah, madam!" answered the girl, "I have just seen that terrible man, Weston, tripping across to the Bell-tower, where poor Sir Thomas Overbury is confined, and I shall now live in constant dread."

"Did he see you?" asked Arabella.

"I think not—I hope not," replied Ida Mara. "I was under the arch below, and he was going the other way, dressed in black velvet, with soft steps, like a cat creeping up to a bird."

Arabella muscled. "Call Jane hither," she said. And when the girl appeared, she added, "Go to the warder opposite there, and ask him the name of the gentleman dressed in black velvet, who just now crossed to the Bell-tower."

The girl retired without any answer; for she was of a somewhat sullen disposition, and discontented at being kept so long in the Tower. She returned in a few minutes, saying, "His name is Doctor Foreman, my Lady; and he has gone, by the King's order, to visit Sir Thomas Overbury, who is sick."

Ida cast down her eyes thoughtfully upon the ground; and Arabella, after giving the maid a sign that she might retire, murmured, "Doctor Foreman!—why, that is the man of whom there was so much talk at the court, a sort of wizard, a conjuror, and a cheat,—suspected, too, of dealing in poisons. I heard the Queen say, his majesty would have him hanged.—Can he be sent to Sir Thomas Overbury by the King?"

"Oh, lady, lady," cried Ida Mara, "it is the same man. Whatever name he may now call himself by, that is Weston. And I will tell you," she added, kneeling on the cushion at the lady's feet, "I will tell you now what it was he wished me to do, that made me fly from him in such terror, which I have never told you before. He wished me to go to a young nobleman of the court, who had been pleased with my music, to live with him for a time in sin, and then——" she paused, and sunk her voice to a whisper, adding, "and then—to put poison in his drink."

Arabella shuddered: "Good heaven!" she cried, "is it possible that such iniquity should live and prosper?—But why did you not accuse him, and bring him to punishment, Ida?"

"Because I had no proof," replied the girl: "at first I fled from him in terror and consternation, knowing that if I did not do as he required, after he had put his secret in my power, he would poison me; and then, when good Sir Harry West delivered me from him, I reflected, and saw that to bring such a charge might but call down destruction on my own head. I was but a poor Italian girl—an alien, a stranger, with no one to speak for me, nothing to corroborate what I said. He had taken care to give me no proof against him; there was but my word against his; and I knew he was supported by many great men, who were more or less in his power, from secrets that they dared not see divulged.—What could I do, lady?"

"You did right, you did right, dear Ida," answered Ara-

bella: "but I fear much that, even now, he goes to Sir Thomas Overbury for no good. I will not believe that the King has sent him; or, if so, the King is but a tool in the hands of others. This poor knight has many enemies, I fear. Are there no means of warning him against so dangerous a physician?"

"Perhaps there may be," answered Ida Mara; "for though there is a guard at each end of the walk on the top of the wall, to prevent his passing further on either side than for mere air and exercise, yet they have never stopped me as I have passed that way; and one day I saw his door open."

"Did you ever meet him?" asked Arabella.

"No, never," replied Ida Mara; "but I hear he is ill now, and confined to his bed."

"Alas!" said Arabella, "who can tell how that illness has been brought about? There were suspicions abroad from the very first. Men discovered that Rochester, instead of being his friend, was his enemy; and there is not such a rancorous hatred on this earth, Ida, as that which dwells in the breast of the ungrateful. This poor man's imprisonment is a living reproach to the King's favourite; and I have many, many doubts."

"I shall not dare to turn my steps that way again," said Ida Mara, "lest I should meet that dreadful man. The very sight of him seems to curdle my whole blood, and makes my heart labour as if it would not beat."

Arabella remained in thought for a few minutes, and then said, "I will go myself, Ida; he must be warned, if possible."

"Nay, lady, nay," answered Ida Mara, "I meant not to say that; I will go. We shall soon see him pass back, and then it will be safe." As she spoke, she approached the window and looked out, keeping herself, however, behind the stonework of the wall.

Arabella followed her, standing somewhat more forward, and gazing down into the open space below. They remained thus, however, for nearly a quarter of an hour, without seeing any one but an occasional labourer, and a party of the guard, proceeding towards the outer gates.

At length Arabella cried, "Here is some one now, Ida," and the girl, leaning her head a little forward, exclaimed, "That is he, that is he!" drawing back instantly from the window with a shudder.

Arabella watched him as he crossed towards the gate. "Tis strange," she said. "I can discover in his appearance none of those deadly signs you speak of. To me, he would

seem but that pitiful thing, a vain old coxcomb, affecting the air and step of youth, dressed in the butterfly finery of early thoughtlessness and banishing the comely gravity of years. He trips along like some court dancing master, fancying himself a treasury of graces, which he bestows as a bounty on less gifted men. But he is gone, *Ida*. Now we will set out together. Nay, I will go with you; for if you are afraid of his company, I am afraid of my solitude. Sometimes, when I am alone, I think I shall go mad."

In execution of their design, the lady and her attendant went out and walked slowly along the wall, towards the tower in which the unhappy *Overbury* was confined. But the orders of the guard were by this time changed; and the man at the angle nearest to the knight's prison dropped his partizan, saying, "You cannot pass here, ladies, unless you give the countersign."

"That we are not able to do," answered *Arabella*, pausing; "we are not soldiers, my good sir, to take the fortress by surprise; and I think they never furnish us poor women with signs or countersigns."

"You cannot pass here, madam, without," replied the man bluffly; "there are new orders given for the custody of the close prisoners; so you must take your walk another way."

Arabella turned sadly back towards her room. But while she did so, we must pursue, for a short time, the course of the dark and infamous villain who had just left the chamber of *Sir Thomas Overbury*. Although his step was as light as air, and debonair as ever, *Doctor Foreman* did not feel altogether well satisfied and at ease.

"The man suspects something," he said, speaking evidently of *Overbury*; "and I doubt this new Lieutenant does his duty well."

What the duty was which he spoke of would not be difficult to say, for the most corrupt hearts apply to their own purposes, however dark and horrible they may be, the highest and the holiest terms; and the reluctant apprehension which, it would seem, *Sir Gervase* always felt in yielding himself to the criminal designs of his patrons, was construed by their less scrupulous accomplice into a lack of due devotion to their cause.

"That girl, too," continued the charlatan to himself, pursuing his way; "she must be provided for. She would make a cruel witness against one, if anything were to come out. *Weston's* the man, however.—My boy *Dick* has no scruples; he can settle both affairs at once; but he must have full power, and not be always hampered by this knave of a Lieutenant. I must see my Lord of *Rochester*, and

get his authority, otherwise we shall make no progress. To-morrow, I hear, is to be his wedding-day with our fair Countess, so he will be in good humour."

Such reveries brought him to the water side, and calling one of the wherries, which were, perhaps, more plentiful upon the Thames in those days than in our own, he made the boatman conduct him at once to Whitehall.

On his visit to Rochester, however, we will not pause, reluctant to dwell upon scenes of such depravity one moment more than is absolutely necessary to the history that we tell. It is well known that strict orders were given to the Lieutenant of the Tower to admit, without restriction, the persons selected for the execution of the designs against the unhappy prisoner. Armed with these, Foreman returned to hold a conference, in which he expected to encounter no obstacles; but on that point he was somewhat disappointed.

The door of his house was opened for him by the little page, whom we have seen on a former occasion carrying his sword; and in his ante-room above he found the man Weston, who had been engaged in carrying off Ida Mara from Highgate. He was dressed as a servant, though in somewhat gay attire; but his face was sullen and down-cast; and, when his worthy master told him to follow him into an inner chamber, he obeyed slowly, and without reply.

"Now, Weston," cried Dr. Foreman, seating himself, "I have got a great and important affair for you."

"I won't undertake it," replied the man.

"Won't undertake it?" repeated Foreman, with every mark of surprise. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," he said, "that I will not undertake any great affair, unless I am to be better rewarded than I was for the last."

"But you were not successful," said the doctor; "all people are paid according to their success."

"I won't be paid so," rejoined Weston; "I run the same risk whether I am successful or not, and so I have a right to the same recompense; and I will have it before-hand too. I will trust to no man."

"There you are right," replied Weston; "and you shall have it before-hand; nor will it be a trifle, I can tell you; for what you have to do will make a great man of you. To set out with, the gentleman who employs me will give you a hundred nobles."

"Come, this is speaking reason," cried Weston, rubbing

his hands; "let us hear what is to be done. For a hundred nobles I will go a good way."

"The affair is very easy," answered Foreman, well pleased to bring him so easily to compliance. "I am about to place you in the service of poor Sir Thomas Overbury, who is a close prisoner in the Tower, you know. No one will be admitted to him but yourself; and, as he is very ill, you must be careful of him. Particularly, you must remark that, as I am his physician, he is to take nothing but what I send him. You must even, perhaps, cook his food for him; for there are sick people, you know, who will eat things that are hurtful to them."

"I understand, I understand," said Weston, with a nod of the head; "is there anything more?"

"Nothing," answered Foreman; "unless you like, by way of amusing yourself, to be very civil to the pretty lady you carried off from Highgate, who is there in the Tower, attending upon the Lady Arabella. You may ask her to take a glass of wine with you; and I will give you some glasses with twisted stalks, very beautiful to see, which I brought from Venice."

"Anything more?" asked the man, in a tone that Dr. Foreman did not altogether like.

"No," he replied; "no; you will have quite enough to do to effect this properly, though my Lord of Rochester will furnish you with sufficient powers, to prevent much trouble about it."

"Well," replied Weston; "I understand you, then, completely; but to be sure that I make no mistake, in consequence of delicate phrases, I had better repeat the whole in plain English."

"It may be as well," said Doctor Foreman, with a nod.

"Thus it is, then," answered Weston; "I am to go into the service of Sir Thomas Overbury in the Tower, to have him quite in my own hands, and to give him the poison that you give me for him?" (Doctor Foreman nodded.) "Then I am to make friends with the girl, and poison her too?" (Doctor Foreman nodded again.) And Weston proceeded: "And for all this I am to have a hundred nobles.—Come, come, dear doctor, it's time we should understand each other. Very likely, if I were but a common servant, such pay might be considered handsome. But people tell me you are my papa."

"There may be some truth in that," said Foreman, with a grin.

"Well, then," rejoined Weston, "you would not have

your dear son put his neck in jeopardy for a hundred nobles?"

"I have often put mine in jeopardy for a less sum," answered Foreman, "before I made the large fortune that I have made, and which I have left to you at my death, if you behave well, Dick. I wish you to work your way up, as I have worked mine: and as you are a shrewd youth, with all the money that you will have from me, you may go much further than I have gone."

"I may go to the gallows, perhaps," replied Weston.

"Pooh, nonsense," answered his worthy father, "if you go to the gallows, the Lord Rochester and the Countess of Essex must go first; and the King would sooner go himself."

"Ay, that is a different affair," cried Weston. "But have you really left me all you have got? for of course that must be a consideration."

"You shall see the will yourself," replied the learned doctor; and, opening a strong box, he took out a parchment from amongst several others, and placed it in the hands of his worshipful son.

The younger man ran his eyes over it with a look of vast satisfaction. "That's enough," he said; "that's enough. I'll do anything you like. Give me the powders."

"Nay," answered Foreman, taking down a bottle from one of the shelves, and pouring a small quantity of the liquor it contained into a phial, "you must give this to Sir Thomas Overbury, by a spoonful at a time. Then, as for the girl, here is this powder. If you can ever get her to eat or drink in your presence, you have nothing to do, but to hold the contents between your finger and thumb—so—and drop it upon her food, or into her cup. It will dissolve instantly; and in half an hour she will be in Heaven.—Sudden deaths will happen; who can help it?"

"Nobody, to be sure," answered the young man, laughing; "but I don't see why you should wish her out of the way."

"Oh, I have good reasons; I have good reasons," said Foreman, nodding his head significantly.

"Ah, well; it's no business of mine," cried Weston. "I'll do the business! Give me the drugs."

Foreman delivered them into his hands; then added several directions as to his conduct, and furnished him with a letter from Lord Rochester to the Lieutenant of the Tower.

To secure all, the hundred nobles were bestowed at once; and Weston departed from the room to make ready for his

expedition. But the first thought that crossed his mind was, "No, no! Overbury, if you like; but the girl is safe. This powder I'll keep for another occasion; and if you play me false, old gentleman, look to yourself."

With this hint of his very filial intentions, he secured the drugs in the heart of a bundle of clothes, and set out upon his errand with as much alacrity as if he was going to a wedding feast.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THERE had been a good deal of bustle and confusion in the Tower during the morning, three days after the events which we have related in the last chapter. Two persons, bearing the appearance of physicians, had crossed from the gate to the tower in which Overbury was imprisoned, and visited him, in company with the Lieutenant, while, from the window of the Lady Arabella's chamber, might be seen a group, consisting of the notorious Doctor Foreman, Weston, and another man, conversing together eagerly, and evidently waiting till the personages who had been admitted to their victim returned.

The physicians soon passed by the spot where they stood, without taking any other notice of them than by a contemptuous look, which the younger of the two bestowed upon Foreman; and immediately after, Sir Gervase Elways joined their evil council, and remained in conversation with them nearly half an hour.

After the consultation was concluded, Foreman quitted the Tower; and the rest of the party separated. Silence and solitude then took possession of the walls and courts around; and during the rest of the day, it was remarked that an unusual degree of stillness prevailed in that part of the fortress, few, if any persons, being seen moving about, and the only noises heard being those which rose from Tower Hill and the streets adjacent.

In the meanwhile, since the day that we last spoke of, Arabella had fallen into a state of deeper despondency than ever. Her efforts for cheerfulness were all vain; and she sat for hours gazing listlessly out of the window, with the tears rising from time to time in her eyes, indicating the sad thoughts that were busy at her heart. It was to no purpose that Ida Mara strove, by every means in her power,

fate. Books had lost their charm for her; music seemed but to increase her grief; and, though once or twice she tried to converse, she soon lost herself in reveries again, from which it was difficult to rouse her.

"Leave me, Ida, leave me," she said, at length, as evening was beginning to fall; "my heart is very heavy, and it is vain to try to lighten it. You have stayed within with me all day, dear girl; go out and breathe the fresh air now. A walk round the walls will do you good."

"I do not like to leave you so sad," replied Ida Mara; "I wish you would come with me. I am sure it were better for you than sitting here alone."

"I will, I will presently," replied Arabella. "Come back in half-an-hour, dear Ida, and I will go with you.—But leave me now."

Ida Mara saw that it was in vain to press her further at that moment, and leaving her, rambled through the vacant courts, and round the wide wall of the Tower, meeting with few of its inhabitants; till, on her return, in one of the narrow passages, she suddenly found herself face to face with one of the men who had carried her off from Highgate. He had evidently been drinking largely, and she made an effort to pass him at once, hoping that he might not notice her.

He stopped her, however, though not uncivilly, saying, "Ah, pretty lady, is that you? I am glad to see you here; for I once did you some wrong: and I don't intend to do so any more, whatsoever they may say.—You forgive me, pretty lady, don't you?"

The man, though not drunk, was not quite sober, and Ida Mara was somewhat alarmed.

"Oh yes, I forgive you freely," she replied; "but I must go on; for the Lady Arabella expects me."

"Nay, stop a bit," said Weston; "we are old acquaintances, you know. I am Sir Thomas Overbury's servant now; but I shan't be long, I think."

Ida listened eagerly. "Poor man, he is very ill, I hear," she replied.

"Ay, that he is," answered Weston, "but he is a devilish long time about it. He's too cunning to give up life easily; and so he makes a hard struggle against death."

"Who would not?" said Ida Mara, with a shudder, for she put her own interpretation on the man's words. "Pray what is his complaint?"

"Nay, I know not," answered Weston; "a multitude, I believe. He makes nothing but complaints from morning

"As many others will," answered Ida Mara.

"Ay, ay," rejoined Weston, with a stupid look, "but you need not be afraid.—I'll keep that for myself. I may have need of it."

Ida Mara did not comprehend what he meant; but she was interested in the fate of Sir Thomas Overbury; and, knowing that her lady would entertain the same feelings, she said, as the man seemed rather loquacious in his wine, "Poor Sir Thomas is very strictly confined, I believe. The guards will let no one pass even near his door?"

"Oh, the guards are gone now," replied Weston. "They are not much wanted. Nobody sees him but myself and Franklyn; and we have admission at all hours."

"Then he is so weak, I suppose," observed Ida Mara, "that he cannot stir from his bed, so that escape is impossible?"

"He might as well try to escape from his grave," rejoined the other; "and yet he lingers long."

"Well, I must go on now," said Ida. "Good night, sir, good night."

"Good night," answered Weston. "I don't suppose I shall see you in the Tower again, pretty lady; for at nine I bring his supper to him, and that is the last meal he will eat, I fancy."

Thus saying, he suffered the fair Italian to pass, and walked on his own way.

Arabella was sitting in the same spot where Ida Mara left her, with the last faint rays of day streaming in from the window upon that face, once so beautiful, but now faded and worn with the anguish of the heart, so that those who had loved her best would hardly have known her. Her eyes were red with weeping; but the tears had been wiped away; and when Ida entered, she turned round and tried to smile.

"Well," she said, "what hast thou seen, dear friend? Come, sit you down beside me, Ida. I shall not go out to-night, though the moon, peeping up there, seems to ask me to come forth under her melancholy light, which is but too like the complexion of my own thoughts, where the only brightness is the reflection from a star that has set."

"I have met with something worth telling, lady," replied Ida Mara; "it is not often one does so within these walls." And taking a seat beside Arabella according to her orders, she began, and in a low voice recounted all that had occurred. Her tone was soft and quiet; but there was an earnest sadness in her manner which seemed to imply that she attached more importance to the conversa-

tion she recapitulated than the mere words would justify. When she had told all, she dropped her voice still further, and added "He is dying, lady, that is clear; and I fear much, by poison!"

"Alas, alas!" said Arabella, "this is a terrible fate; and if he had faults, as doubtless he had, they have been punished direfully. Oh, Ida, Ida! what a horrible thing! To die in a gloomy prison, debarred the support of kindred faces round one, or the comfort of the voices that we love, or the touch of the hand of affection, or the consolation of a good man's prayer—with assassins to tend our bed of death, and the eyes that hate us gazing on our agony. Oh, Ida! it is too terrible. I will go to him—a woman, Christian; I cannot stay here and leave him to expire without any one to pity or any one to help. I must go to him, Ida. You say that the guards are gone; perhaps the doors may be locked; but still I can speak to him through the window. I can tell him that I grieve for him. I can bid him look to God—to his Saviour, to atonement, to redemption—to a world where the sorrows of this earth shall find compensation at last."

Her words were somewhat wild, and her manner unusually vehement; but though Ida feared that Arabella might witness a scene which would only tend to agitate and depress her still further, she did not like to remonstrate.

"I am ready, lady," she replied; "what shall I bring, you?"

"Nothing but a veil," answered Arabella; "my temples burn, the cool air will refresh me. Put on the black mantle, Ida, and draw the hood over your head; then no one will see us as we glide along the walls; or, if they do, they will take us for the spectres of some who have been here murdered. How many! Oh, God, how many!"

Ida obeyed her directions; and then, issuing forth, but without passing through the room in which the servants sat, they walked with slow and silent steps towards the tower in which Sir Thomas Overbury was lingering out the last few hours of his miserable captivity. All was silent and still. The sun was now fully set; the gibbous moon, a few days short of her full, just shone over the parapet; the night was cool, but clear, without a breath of air stirring in the heaven; the murmur of the great city rose up around, like the sound of distant waters rolling over a pebbly bed; and a red star, shining near the earth's bright satellite, looked rather like an angry rival of the Queen of Night than her soft attendant train-bearer.

Stealing quietly on, Arabella and her companion reached the tower where the poor captive lay, entered the open gateway which led to the stairs, and tried the door on the right hand, which they knew to be that of the sick man's chamber. It was locked, however.

"We must go to the window," said Arabella, in a low voice; and issuing forth again, she walked round to a small loophole, at the height of about four feet from the ground, the casement of which she found open.

"Keep where you can see it any one comes, Ida," said Arabella; and, approaching close to the window, she looked in.

A lamp was standing on the table, shedding its faint and sickly light around the narrow chamber in the tower; and a pale, emaciated form lay stretched upon a pallet close beneath the lady's eyes, as she looked through the loophole. Beside him, on a stool, was a cup containing some liquid, and a book; but the fluid had not been tasted, and he seemed but little in a condition to read. Every feature of the sick man's face betokened pain; his eyes were turned towards the rafters over head, his knees drawn up, his right arm under his head, and the thin fingers of his hand grasping the pillow, as if in bitter agony. A moan burst from his lips as Arabella watched him, and, without further pause, she said, in a low but distinct voice, "Sir Thomas—Sir Thomas Overbury!"

The unhappy man started up, and looked round the room with faint and weary eyes, but could see no one.

"Who is that?" he asked, turning his face at length towards the window. "Some one called me. Whose face is that? I cannot see the features."

"It is I," answered the lady; "it is I—a friend, Sir Thomas."

"A friend?" said Overbury, with a woful shake of the head. "God help us!—Is there such a thing?"

"It is Arabella Seymour," replied the lady—"once Arabella Stuart, and she comes to comfort you, as far as a weak fellow captive can."

"Ah, lady, lady!" exclaimed Overbury; "does one whose misery I myself have wrought come now to comfort me, and generously call herself my friend?"

"Yes, Sir Thomas," answered Arabella; "and I beseech you remember, that not only a poor fallible creature like yourself, but the God whom we have offended, the Saviour whom we crucified, comes likewise to the sick bed of every sinner, calls himself his friend, and offers comfort, hope, and consolation, if we will but accept it."

"Lady, I have been trying to think of such things," replied the dying man; "I have been trying to turn my thoughts to my Saviour; but I am tormented by fiends in human shape, that give me no rest. Lady, I am dying of poison. For weeks I have taken nothing *that* is not drugged. My food, my drink, the very salt,* which, once given by the wild Arab, secures his bitterest enemy from his vengeance, is mingled with deadly minerals."

"Alas, alas!" cried Arabella, with the tears rising in her eyes, "how can I help you?"

"No way," he replied. "God has withdrawn his countenance from me, perhaps to restore it when purified hereafter; but in this world there is no more hope. Would it were over, for I am in torture. Not a limb, not a muscle, is sound; and yet I will not make myself their instrument—I will not take more of anything they give me than is absolutely needful for the bare support of life."

"I can bring you food," exclaimed Arabella, eagerly; "the guards are now away. Through this window I can supply you every night."

"Oh, blessings on you," cried the wretched man. "You are an angel indeed."

Just as he spoke, Ida Mara ran up to Arabella, exclaiming, "Crouch down, crouch down, lady! Here are two men coming with a light. They will not see us in that corner."

Bending down in the angle of the wall, and covered by the deep shadow that it cast, Arabella and the fair Italian waited, in the belief that the men would pass. But though their steps were soon heard coming, the sound ceased when they reached the gate of the tower, and the moment after voices were distinguished speaking in the chamber of Sir Thomas Overbury.

The first words did not clearly reach the ear of those without; but Arabella crept somewhat nearer to the window, and then she heard the unfortunate man reply, "I will not take anything. I do not want it."

"Ay, but you must take some supper, or a little wine at least," said a rough voice.

"No, I will not," he answered, shortly. "I know your horrible devices. I will take no more from your hands; I would rather die of starvation. Put the supper down there; and when you are gone, I will cut from the heart of the meat, which you cannot poison, sufficient to support

* It was discovered afterwards that his salt was mingled daily with white precipitate.

life. I have an antidote, too, that you know not of, which will make what I do eat sure. But I will take nothing while you are here.* The very sight of such fiends destroys me."

"Come, come," said another voice, "this is all nonsense, Sir Thomas. Take some wine, or I will pour it down your throat. You will die of hunger; and then men will say that we have poisoned you."

"They will speak but too truly," cried Overbury. "Get you hence, get you hence! I will drink nothing."

After these words came a low murmuring for several minutes, as if two persons were speaking together in an under tone; and, unable to refrain any longer, Arabella raised her head and looked in.

The two men, Weston and Franklyn, who had been appointed to attend upon Sir Thomas Overbury in prison, were standing together near the table, apparently in consultation, with their heads close together, and far too eager in the dreadful occupation which they had undertaken, to notice, at the dark window, the face gazing at them from without. At length, the former approached the bedside of the prisoner while the other went round towards the head of the couch, saying, in a civil tone, "I wish you would take something, Sir Thomas."

"I will not," cried the unhappy man. "What are you doing there?" he added.

"Only smoothing your bolster," replied the villain; but at the same instant he snatched the pillow from beneath the dying man's head, and cast it upon his face. The other murderer threw himself upon it, while Weston held it tightly down; and, with a loud and piercing scream, Arabella clasped her hands together, and darted away along the wall, crying "Murder, Murder!"

Ida Mara followed her as fast as possible, but she was not yet concealed by the buildings, when one of the men looked out. He instantly ran back, pale and trembling, and whispered to his companion, who was still holding the pillow tightly down over the face of their victim, "He is gone; you may take it off—I have seen his spirit!"

Weston gazed at him with wild and haggard eyes for a moment, and then removed the pillow. A slight convulsion passed across Overbury's countenance, and then all was still.

CHAPTER XLIV.

IDA MARA sat by the bedside of Arabella during the whole of that night, and a sad and terrible night it was. Her mind, agitated and worn with her own cares, had given way at the terrible sight which she had witnessed. The dark deed haunted her imagination; the forms of the murderers still appeared before her eyes; she heard their voices ringing in her ears; the last look of their wretched victim, before they extinguished the lingering spark of life for ever, remained present to her remembrance, hanging like a terrible picture before her, and her thoughts and words were all confused and wild.

Ida Mara hoped and trusted that time would remove such horrible images, and restore the sweet being she so dearly loved to tranquillity and reason. But day went by after day, and although some slight amendment was perceptible, Arabella's mind never recovered its tone. At times, indeed, she would be quite collected and calm; would speak, and reason, and lament, and weep over her fate as she had been accustomed to do before. But often, even in the midst of her most quiet conversation, when no subject of a painful or exciting nature engaged her thoughts, she would suddenly seem to lose herself; her words would become rambling and unconnected; and she would pause, and put her hand to her head as if she felt that all was not right there, ending with a long deep fit of silence, afraid to speak lest what she uttered should be incoherent.

At other times, again, her mind would be quite astray; she would fancy she saw strange faces, and heard dying groans; she would think that she herself was to be murdered, and would cling to Ida in terror, grievous to behold.

Then she would talk of former days; of him she loved; of their first hours of affection; she would fancy that he was gone up on some embassy to a foreign court, and would return speedily; and she would sit and sing the songs of peace and joy till Ida wept at the contrast between such wild but happy dreams of a disordered intellect, and the sad and stern realities of that sweet lady's fate. All these various changes, however, exhausted her strength and wore her frame; and even in the lucid intervals when her mind was completely itself, the gloomy sense of her wretchedness undermined her health, and wrought a sad change in her appearance.

At these times she would often talk of the events of that dark and terrible night when the designs against Overbury's life were consummated; and though, at first, Ida strove to direct her attention to some less horrible subject, she soon found it was in vain, and, on the contrary, endeavoured to lead Arabella to discuss it quietly and reasonably in the hope that, by regulating her thoughts upon that point, her mind might be restored to its tone.

Some indulgence was now shown to the poor captive; and though she was only permitted to see her fellow-prisoner and kinswoman, Lady Shrewsbury, upon one or two occasions, yet other friends from without were frequently admitted to visit her, and two of the King's physicians were instructed to watch over her health.

The greatest comfort, however, that Arabella received was when some post from France brought her messages from her husband full of that deep and tender affection which he never ceased to entertain for her to the last hour of his life. She found that he generally hovered about in the neighbourhood of the coast, still hoping, still praying, that he might be permitted to rejoin her, and pass the rest of his days in wiping the tears from her eyes, and blotting out sorrow in happiness.

Those hopes and prayers were daily disappointed; but still they were a comfort to his mind; and once or twice, when a letter, in his own hand, was secretly introduced into the Tower, by some of those who visited the lady, it would produce a great and manifest change. Though it generally made her weep at first, she would become more cheerful and more resigned, and often, sitting down, would write an eloquent appeal to the King, or to his ministers, trying to excite in them some sense of justice and of compassion.

Sometimes, when news from Seymour had been delayed for a longer period than usual, she would send Ida Marthorth—for which permission could generally be obtained from the Lieutenant—to seek for intelligence at the house of any one who was likely to receive communications from France.

Generally these visits were to the court of England, or to persons in the city of London; but occasionally Ida was sent to different members of the lady's own family, or of Seymour's, in order to obtain some tidings, even though the persons she sought lived at some distance from London. When this was the case, Arabella, who never forgot, even when her intellect wandered most wildly, to think of the comfort and safety of others, sent her old and faithful ser-

vant Cobham with her fair companion ; but still the most frequent channel of communication between Seymour and his unhappy wife was our good old friend, Sir Harry West, from whom she was generally sure to receive some news every week, or at least some comforting assurance that nothing but accidents had delayed the arrival of intelligence from across the channel. While Ida was gone upon any of these errands, Arabella would remain sad and gloomy, and often would take no nourishment for a whole day, if she was absent so long ; and the faithful girl always reluctantly left her, even for a few hours, seeing that she invariably became worse during her absence ; but when the lady was once possessed with the idea that news had been long delayed, that something must have gone wrong with her husband, that he must be ill, or dead—fancies which frequently assailed her—Ida, as the lesser of two evils, was fain to go wherever there was any chance of obtaining information.

Such had been the case one morning, when, for several days, they had been without any communication with the court or the city. A greater degree of bustle and activity had been observable in the Tower than usual ; but, occupied with their own sad thoughts, neither Arabella nor Ida Mara had given any attention to that which was passing around them, although the servant Cobham had mentioned something of fresh prisoners, of a high rank, being added to the number already within the walls. When Ida Mara, however, returned from the house of the Earl of Shrewsbury, to which she had been sent, she entered the lady's chamber in a state of greater agitation than she generally displayed. She strove, indeed, with anxious care for Arabella, to render her own tone and manner as quiet as possible, while, sitting down beside her, she proceeded to tell all she had gathered in her morning's walk.

The first news was, that contrary winds had prevented any vessels arriving from France for nearly a week, but that intelligence was expected every day. Arabella looked sadly disappointed, and Ida hastened to turn her attention to another theme.

"The whole town is in a commotion, dear lady," she said, "with events which, though terrible and painful, I cannot and will not regret. I told you some days ago that the Lieutenant, Sir Gervase Elways, had been removed and arrested, but I did not know the cause."

"And what may it be?" said Arabella, in an indifferent tone ; "it matters not to me who is my gaoler, Ida."

"No, lady," answered the young Italian ; "but dark

deeds have at length been brought to light ; and justice has been done upon the wicked."

"Then there has been a sad clearing of the streets of London, and of the court too," replied Arabella.

"Indeed there has," said Ida Mara ; "and some who I cannot help thinking were your worst enemies, are now close prisoners within these walls."

"God have mercy on them !" rejoined the lady, without even inquiring who they were ; "for they will find none from man, unless they be very wicked indeed."

"I hope they may not," answered Ida Mara ; "for it is but fitting that such crimes should be punished. The murderers of Sir Thomas Overbury, lady——"

"Ha, what of them ?" exclaimed Arabella, eagerly.

"They have been brought to justice, madam," answered Ida Mara. "Weston, the principal assassin, was tried some days ago, and executed the day before yesterday, though he, it seems, was only a tool, though a willing one. That dark and terrible man, who called himself Foreman, but whom I knew long ago by the same name of Weston, was, it would appear, the chief agent of the higher fiends who moved the whole."

"And what has become of him ?" asked Arabella. "Has he escaped ?"

"The vengeance of man he has, but not that of God," replied Ida Mara ; "he died suddenly at Lambeth about a fortnight ago, and there is strong suspicion that some of his own poisons, administered to him by the hand of his own son, for the purpose of sooner obtaining possession of his wealth, saved him from public trial and execution. But there are multitudes more involved in this terrible affair. A woman, of the name of Turner, has been hanged this morning at Tyburn. A number of people, I understand,—ay, ladies of high rank—went to see her die ; and Sir Gervase Elways himself was tried yesterday, and condemned to death for murder."

"Heaven help us !" cried Arabella, "that men of station and education from amongst the once famed gentlemen of England, should dip their hands in such foul and horrible things !"

"Ay, lady," continued Ida Mara, "but there are higher heads still against which the charge is levelled. He who was lately my Lord of Rochester, now Earl of Somerset, with his fair but wicked Countess, are both imprisoned here, as those who set the others on to commit the terrible deed. Their trial is expected every day, and the King vows they shall have no mercy, though men think it some-

what strange that Sir Thomas Monson, the chief agent of the Countess, was yesterday, in the midst of his trial, carried from the bar by the yeomen of the Tower, and the whole proceedings against him stopped."

"Indeed!" cried Arabella; "indeed! that is very strange. But when the innocent are punished, as I have been for no offence, we need not wonder that the guilty escape. So will it be with Somerset, Ida," she continued; "the King will not dare, I fear, to strike at one who may possess more secrets than either you or I ever dreamed of."

"At all events, dear lady," answered Ida, "his favour at the court is gone; and, as I cannot but think that to him you owe much of the persecution you have endured, your appeals to the King for justice may have more attention, now that his influence is at an end."

"True, true," cried Arabella, starting up with a look of joy: "I never thought of that. Oh, God of Heaven, grant it!—Quick, bring me paper, dear girl. I will write to the King at once. Perhaps he will listen to me now;" and she sat down and composed one of those touching epistles to James, which have more than once brought tears into the eyes of those who read them, even in these far-removed times.

For several days the events which we have mentioned gave her hope; but the heartless tyrant whom she addressed paid no attention to her petition. Days, hours, weeks, slipped away without the slightest change. The guilty Somerset and his beautiful fiend were brought to trial, judged, and condemned; and then the favour of their vicious sovereign stepped in, and saved them from the death they merited! But poor Arabella derived no benefit from the fall of two beings, who, if there had been justice in the land, should have expiated on the scaffold the manifold crimes too clearly proved against them.

A more terrible fate than death, indeed, awaited them. Sent from the court to an estate in the country, to which they were bound to confine themselves, their dark and criminal love was soon turned to the most deadly hatred. The intense impression of each other's guilt rendered their mutual abhorrence, and its consequences, almost as horrible as their passion and the events which it produced. Living in the same house, seeing each other daily, they dwelt together as strangers, and when the one crossed the path of the other, looks of enmity and scorn came upon those two fair countenances, where once had shone the eager fire of vicious love. Thus passed many a year of painful existence, with the awful prospect

of death and retribution before them, till a strange and terrible disease swept the woman from the earth, and her husband fell lingering into the grave.

With Arabella the last hope faded away, when she found that no change in the court and councils of the King produced any favourable result to her; and with it the powers of life seemed gradually to sink. Slowly, but sadly, the last hour approached, with all the terrible concomitants of weary sickness and wandering intellect; and the two or three faithful friends, who now almost daily visited her, saw, with mingled grief and relief, that the period of her sufferings would not be long protracted.

One of the most constant of these was good Sir Harry West, in whose conversation she seemed to find more consolation and comfort than in that of any one else, except Ida Mara. With him she was always tranquil, and generally collected. Their conversation was constantly about her husband; and the good old knight, though he did not strive to buoy her up with those earthly hopes which he knew would prove false, dwelt upon those higher and less frail assurances of happiness at some future period, which suited well his years and character, and harmonised also with Arabella's feelings.

On the subject of religion, which was her greatest blessing and comfort now in the hour of her dark adversity, her mind was always as clear and bright, as in those days when, in intellect and virtue, she stood in the midst of a court, superior to the allurements of the idle vanity and pitiful ambition that characterised it; but on every other subject, reason often failed.

To Sir Harry West she would frequently speak of that painful wandering of thought, that want of control over her own mind, which now too often came upon her.

"In those moments," she said one day, "when there is, as it were, a cloud upon me, and all my ideas seem misty and indistinct, the weight of my sorrow is the most burdensome. I cannot refrain from wishing for death; and a voice, like that of a fiend, appears to urge me on to seek the calm and tranquil resting-place, where no tyrant's hand can reach, no persecution trouble my repose. I have only, however, to open the page of this Holy Book, to look into the promises there given, to remember how the only pure and holy One that ever lived and died, suffered without a murmur, and the evil spirit flies, overmatched, and my mind acquires its faculties again. I hope not for life, Sir Harry. I long for death; and have only one wish that I venture to indulge, which is, that I might see

once more him whose love has cost me so much misery, though I would not lose that love, if I might win a long life of happiness in exchange."

Sir Harry West made her no reply, but turned the conversation to another theme; and, aided by Ida Mara, who now never left Arabella night nor day, he contrived to while away another hour of the poor captive's time, without any return of that sad wandering, which she dreaded more herself than even the approach of death. Nevertheless, the old knight, as he turned him home again, pondered deeply over what she had said, and that night visited several of the most influential personages of the court, with whom his own high character gave him considerable influence.

Ten days passed afterwards, during which he visited the lady several times, but spoke less of William Seymour than before. Perhaps it was that he saw her strength was now rapidly failing, and feared to touch upon a subject that moved and agitated her much.

The last time he came she was stretched upon a couch, which had been brought into the chamber where she usually sat; and, holding out her hand to him, with a faint smile, she said, "It is coming rapidly, Sir Harry; and this unhappy heart will soon be at peace. I am sure of it, for during the two last days my mind has been quite itself again. The memories of past happiness have come around me sweetly and tenderly, like children round a parent's death-bed; and I am quite prepared to go where they will follow me, and nothing ever take them from me again. Nay, I have made you weep, my friend, and poor Ida, too. I have cost that dear girl many tears, but when I am gone I am sure you will be a father to her.—Is it not so?"

"I will, indeed," answered Sir Harry West; "I owe her far more than that, were it possible to repay the debt."

"There is something more," said Arabella. "When I am dead, Sir Harry, tell my dear husband that I loved him to the last; cut off a lock of my hair with your own hand, and give it to him. It is all that poor Arabella has to send. Tell him that we shall meet hereafter, that I wait for him; and then none shall separate us.—And now, farewell, kind friend, I must not have you stay. I do believe that we shall never meet again; for the impression rests upon my mind, that the sun which sinks to-night will not rise again for me."

CHAPTER XLV.

ON the morning of a rough and stormy day, a fishing boat, of a large and heavy build, and filled principally with Frenchmen, touched the low beach of the Kentish coast, at the distance of about a mile from Folkstone, near the spot where now stands the pleasant little village of Sandgate. The moment that the boat took ground, a tall and powerful man, habited in dark but well-fashioned garments, sprang at once in the water, and waded to the shore; then paused for a moment, while one of the fishermen followed him, carrying a small valise, counted out a number of pieces of gold into the man's hand, took the valise from him, and without another word, but "Remember," turned his steps towards the Hythe. Striding on at a rapid pace, he soon reached that place, and paused to look round for an inn. When he found one, he asked for no refreshment, but inquired eagerly, if he could hire or buy a horse. One was without difficulty procured to purchase; an old saddle and bridle were added; and mounting, without exchanging one word more than was necessary with any one, the stranger rode on at a quick pace upon the road to London.

The people of the inn gazed after him, commenting as usual on his demeanour; but whatever were their remarks, he troubled not his mind; and at the fullest speed the beast could put forth, he urged the horse on towards the capital. His eyes as he rode, were generally bent down upon the ground; and no change in the gloomy expression of his countenance displayed itself, except when the horse slackened his pace, and then he started, as if from a deep reverie, to urge it on as quickly as before. Twice he stopped to give it water, and once to let it feed; but, while he did so, he stood beside it, uttering not a syllable to any one; and the moment the measure of corn was consumed, he sprang upon his back again, and resumed his journey. On Wrotham Heath, the animal's strength began to fail; and, at the village beyond, the traveller inquired if he could buy another horse. But none was to be found till he reached Farningham, where, at a little inn which then stood by the roadside, he obtained a wretched beast, for which he paid whatever was demanded, caused the saddle instantly to be placed upon it, and leaving the other behind, with orders to feed it well till the next day, he again rode on, and pursued his way to London, without

having tasted food since he touched the English shore, though nearly twelve hours had elapsed, and the sun had long set. Through the dark and gloomy streets of the capital he took his way without pause or inquiry, till he stopped at the gate of a large house, just beyond the city wall, where he sprang to the ground, and rang the bell.

A man with a light opened the doors, and gazed upon the visitor's face as on that of a stranger. But suddenly a gleam of recognition lighted up the old servant's face, and exclaiming, "Ah! is that you, sir?" he took the rein, threw it over a hook fixed into the wall for that purpose, and lighted the new comer into the house.

It was towards eleven o'clock on the same night that two gentlemen stood at the great western gate of the Tower, demanding admission.

"That cannot be, Sir Harry," said the warder on duty; "and though I wish to show you all respect, it is against the rule."

"I know it," said Sir Harry West; "but here is an order from the Constable, which supersedes all rule. You will perceive that it is for any hour of the night or day."

"Ay, sir, that is a different affair," replied the man. "Follow me, and I will pass you through the wards. 'Tis well I was not asleep; you might have knocked long enough if I had been."

"Lead on, lead on, my good fellow," said the companion of Sir Harry West, a tall man, wrapped in a large dark mantle.

The warder turned and looked at him; for there is nothing which irritates a slow and deliberate person so much as impatience in another; and perhaps the man might not have quickened his step in the slightest degree, had there not been that look of stern, anxious grief in the handsome countenance of the stranger, which almost always exercises a certain degree of power, even over the cold and indifferent.

Moving on without reply, then, he led the two late visitors through the several doors and gates, till Sir Harry said, "Now I can pass on, warder."

"Not without the word, sir," replied the soldier: and giving it, he suffered the gentlemen to proceed alone.

They bent their way straight towards the apartments of Arabella Seymour, and mounting the stairs, knocked at the door. No one answered, and the taller of the two, though it seemed that his hand trembled sadly, lifted the latch at once, and went in. It was a small ante-room that he entered, which was tenanted by only one person, the

maid Jane, who was sitting in a chair, so sound asleep by the fire, that she had heard no noise. The stranger gave her a look almost fierce; but Sir Harry put his hand upon his arm, saying, "This way, William. We can enter this room, and most likely shall find Ida here."

Without uttering a word, the stranger strode on, and opened the door; but, to the surprise of Sir Harry West, who had imagined that at that late hour Arabella must have retired to her bed-chamber, they found lights and several people there.

Stretched upon the same couch where she had been lying when the old knight visited her in the morning, was the pale form of the once beautiful Arabella Stuart. Ida Mara was kneeling near her head, supporting her, while an old man dressed as a clergyman, was placing a silver cup to her lips, and pronouncing the solemn words with which the Sacramental wine is offered us in the Communion. At the lady's feet knelt her good servant Cobham; and every one was so intently occupied with the rite which was taking place, that the opening of the door passed unnoticed.

Seymour paused, till the last prayer had been uttered by the chaplain, and Arabella, placing her hand over her eyes, had murmured a few words, which were not heard distinctly. The young gentleman then advanced slowly, and as silently as possible; but the sound of his footfall caught his poor wife's ear; and turning on the couch, she exclaimed, "Whose step is that?—It is he! It is he—I am sure!—Oh Seymour!" and she stretched out her arms towards him.

Seymour rushed forward, and caught her to his heart.

"This is a blessing! This is a blessing!" cried Arabella; "Now I am ready to die. Speak to me, Seymour! Speak to your Arabella!"

But Seymour could not; for he had buried his eyes upon her bosom, and tears drowned all utterance.

"Nay," she continued, "nay, Seymour, do not grieve so bitterly! I am happy and contented now I have seen you once more! God has heard my anxious prayer. I have nothing more to look for in life; I am ready to obey His summons."

"Oh, live, live! my Arabella!" cried Seymour, raising his head and kissing her eagerly; "live yet for happiness! The connivance which has been given to my return, the order for my admission here, all make me hope that the King will yet relent."

"He knows that I am dying, Seymour," replied Arabella; "otherwise he had not consented. But still, William, I will live for happiness, and happiness with you in a world"

where real happiness only is known. We may be parted once more for a brief space of time. To you, indeed, it may seem long ; for you will have to struggle with the cares and sorrows of earth ; but, when you arrive at the end, and look back, it will seem but an hour. I know it by experience. But let me look at you," she continued ; " I thought I should never see that dear face again. You are changed, my love, and worn ; but I know that your heart is unaltered. How much have I to be thankful for, that the hands I love best will close my eyes, the lips I love best receive my parting breath, and that soon I shall be gone from a world of misery, to wait for you where misery is at an end."

It was in vain that she sought to give him consolation ; the very resignation she displayed, the gentleness, the tenderness, but added poignancy to his regret ; and while the weak and dying girl was calm, collected, and content, the strong man was overwhelmed with sorrow, agony, and repining, terrible to witness.

For about half an hour, the unexpected arrival of her husband seemed to have given Arabella new life ; her voice had become strong and clear ; the dimness which had spread over her eyes was removed ; even the grey shade which coming dissolution had cast over the face, fled for a short time, and during a few minutes a pale pink glow, like the last which tinges the evening sky, arose in her cheek.

To Scymour those signs gave no hope, for the terrible change which had taken place in her since last he had held her in his arms, had come upon him suddenly, and spoke too plainly of speedy death, for him to entertain a doubt.

To Ida Mara, however, the alteration which had taken place, during the last two or three years, in that sweet lady's appearance had been so gradual, that she knew not how great it was ; and the signs that she saw of reviving life did give a faint and trembling hope, that the fiat of the Almighty had not gone forth irrevocably.

It was soon extinguished, however ; the effects of joy speedily passed away ; and, only the more rapidly for the temporary relief, the great enemy of life made progress in his conquest. The voice sank low again, the film came over the eyes, the colour faded from the cheek, the brow and temples grew awfully pale, the greyness of the tomb once more spread over the whole countenance.

" She is departing," said the chaplain, in a low voice.

Arabella's eyes sought her husband's face ; but it seemed as if she did not see him.

" William," she said ; " William, keep close to me !—It is coming, my beloved, it is coming ! do not leave me !"

"I am here, dear one, I am here," replied Seymour, gazing in agony upon her countenance. "My arms are round thee, Arabella! I will not leave thee; would I could go with thee!"

"I am very cold, William," she said. "William,—William——"

Her voice ceased, and, with a slight shudder, the fair, pure spirit passed from its earthly prison and a tyrant's will, to freedom, and the presence of the King of kings.

"She is gone!" said Sir Harry West; "she is gone! God receive your soul, sweet girl!"

But Seymour still held her in his arms, and bending down his eyes upon the inanimate form of her he loved, wept long and bitterly. When he raised them at length, and gazed upon her face, he was surprised to see a smile upon her lips. He almost fancied that he had deceived himself,—that she still lived. But it was fixed and immovable, only to be changed by the slow decay of the tomb.

"How sweet she looks," said Sir Harry West, in a whisper, to the chaplain. "I have often heard, that the look we bore in infancy comes back upon us after death."

"With those who have lived a good life," replied the clergyman, in the same tone; "and one has but to gaze upon that face, to see that she has departed to peace and rest.—Be comforted, sir," he said, advancing and taking William Seymour's hand; "be comforted. If ever there was one for whose release from a life of care and sorrow, those she has left behind should rejoice rather than mourn, it was this sweet lady. Here on earth, she had nothing to expect but misery. Where she is gone she has nothing to meet with but joy and glory. Pure and blameless in her life, full of faith and truth, relying on the atonement of her Saviour to wipe out the only stain upon her—the stain of Adam's fault, we cannot, we dare not, doubt, that joy will be her portion for evermore."

"It were worse than blasphemy!" said Sir Harry West.

"True, true," answered Seymour; "I know it is so; I know these tears are selfish; but tell me, can a man lose the brightest possession that God has given him, and remain to linger on through years, destitute of that which made life valuable, and yet not mourn?—Bless thee, my sweet wife!" he continued, bending down and kissing her cold brow. "May I soon join thee! for did the Almighty's will give me back all that I have lost but thee, ay, and add state and station, wealth and high command, friends, honours, glory, all that earth can afford, I still have lost the jewel of my soul, which nothing but another world can

restore.—I dare not, sir," he added, turning to the chaplain, "in the presence of my departed saint, call down upon the heads of those that wronged her, the vengeance which is their due; but sure I am that the retributive hand of Heaven will not be idle; and that for such deeds as these, when Almighty forbearance is exhausted, due payment will be given.—Ay, I am sure of it, on him and on his race shall descend the awful curse that plagues the wicked from generation to generation. From father unto son it shall extend, and one shall lay the foundation of the other's downfall. Blood and destruction, sorrow and dishonour, defeat, disgrace and desolation, shall haunt them to remote posterity; and the life and sufferings of Arabella Stuart shall stand upon the page of history, to justify, even in the eyes of men, the terrible vengeance of a righteous God."

"Hush, I beseech you, hush!" exclaimed the chaplain. "Remember, such words repeated——"

"I fear him not," replied William Seymour, vehemently; "he has taken from me the life of my life; and he can but send me to join her somewhat sooner. Oh, that he would—the crime were his then, not mine; and were it not for the fatal promise I have sealed with honour, to stay but four-and-twenty hours within these realms, I would beard him on his throne, and tell him of all his infamy.—Nay, my kind friend," he added, speaking to Sir Harry West, who advanced and took his hand, "I will keep my word; but, had I not poured forth the indignation of my heart, I think that it would have broken.—Now leave me here for a short time; I would fain spend an hour in sad and solemn thought beside her I so dearly loved. I shall be calmer then; for I will try to pray, and seek submission to the will of God.—If you will wait for me that time, Sir Harry, I will take my last leave of all I loved on earth, and gladly quitting these hated shores, will seek in other lands for some tranquillity."

No one opposed his request; but leaving him alone with the dead body of Arabella, Sir Harry West and Ida Mara remained in the ante-room till the clock struck one.

That sound seemed to rouse William Seymour; for a few minutes after he came forth, with a countenance sad and stern, but calmer than before.

Advancing at once to Ida Mara, he took her hand, and gazed in her face, for a moment or two, without being able to speak. At length, however, he said, "How can I ever thank you? God will reward your long-devoted love for her whom he has smitten. Leave her not, Ida; leave her not, I beseech you, till she is committed to the earth; and

then remember, that I shall always believe whatsoever I can do to protect and make you happy, is done for her. Sir Harry West, I know, will watch over your fate ; but there is nothing which you can require, and he can ask on your behalf, that will not give me consolation to perform.—Now, good friends, I am ready ; my last adieu is said.”

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE funeral of Arabella was over ; and her grave was made, amongst the mighty of the land, in the Abbey of Westminster. Two months had passed ; and Ida Mara, in deep mourning, sat in the hall of Sir Harry West's house, occupied in the usual task of embroidery. The good knight had left her about half an hour before.—Mr. Crompton, who, as the reader may remember, had aided in the escape from Highgate, and was a frequent visitor at the house, having desired to speak with him alone.

Ida was still busily engaged upon her task, with her mind occupied with sad and serious thoughts—though the deep grief which she felt for the loss of her to whom she had been so sincerely attached, had naturally subsided, in some degree, under the balmy power of time—when Sir Harry returned, with a grave and somewhat agitated air.

“Put down your needle, my dear Ida,” said the old knight, “and listen to me. I have something to tell you of importance.”

“What is the matter, dear Sir Harry ?” she exclaimed, gazing at him eagerly. “You are moved. Something has grieved you.”

“No, indeed, Ida,” replied Sir Harry West, “it is not exactly grief, though, perhaps, I am going to lose you ; but if it is for your happiness, my dear child, I shall be content.”

“To lose me ?” cried Ida Mara, turning deadly pale. “Are you going to send me away from you ?”

“No, not to send you,” replied Sir Harry ; “but, perhaps, you may think fit to go, when you hear what I have to say. You know Mr. Crompton ; he is a gentleman of good family, of honour, and high principles—kind and generous in heart, and, though not very wealthy, has sufficient for happiness. Often having seen you with the Lady

Arabella, and deeply touched with those high qualities which you have displayed towards her, and, indeed, towards every one, he asks your hand."

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried Ida Mara, with all her Italian eagerness; "tell him, I beseech you, Sir Harry, I am unworthy of the honour he intends me. Explain to him that I spring from another class. Tell my origin—tell him how you first found me, a poor Italian girl, homeless, friendless, destitute."

"I have told him all," replied Sir Harry West. "I judged it right to do so; and he thinks as I do, Ida, that such virtues, graces, and goodness as you possess, form a better inheritance than stored-up gold, or even a noble name. The only question is, Ida, do you—can you love him?"

Ida paused; and Sir Harry felt her hand, which he had taken, tremble violently.

"No," she said, at length; "no, I cannot."

"But why," asked the old knight. "He is handsome in person, gentle and kind in demeanour."

She shook her head sorrowfully. "I cannot love him," she answered. "You will think me wrong, I fear, Sir Harry, to wish rather to remain dependent on your bounty, than change it for any other fate on earth."

"I do not think you wrong, my dear child," replied Sir Harry; "all I have is yours; for to you I owe whatever remains to me of life. But you must give me a decided answer; for I must deal plainly with this gentleman."

"My answer is plain, my benefactor," replied Ida. "I cannot love him—I cannot wed him."

"Good faith, then, dear Ida," said the old knight, with a smile, "if you will not wed any one else, I shall be fain to marry you myself."

"What is that you said!" exclaimed Ida, with the light coming into her eyes. "What is that you said?"

"I was but jesting, Ida," answered the knight; and immediately the blood rushed up into her cheek, and spread rosy over her forehead. "I was but jesting," repeated Sir Harry West; but Ida was very much agitated, and thinking he had pained her, he added, "I am well aware, my dear child, that however great may be the comfort and happiness to me, to have you with me during my latter years—however deeply and tenderly I may love you, I must not, and ought not, to desire that you should sacrifice all for me."

"I would sacrifice all—everything for you," cried Ida Mara, eagerly. "I never, never wish to quit you."

"Hear me, Ida, hear me," said Sir Harry West; "your sense of duty and gratitude I know is unbounded, but the time may come when you will find some one to love——"

"No," answered Ida; "no, I shall never love any one but you. If you send me from you, I shall die;" and sinking down into a chair, with a pale cheek and a quivering lip, she covered her eyes with her hand.

"What is the matter, dear Ida?" said the knight, tenderly. "You seem ill; what is it that you feel?"

"I do not know—I do not know," she answered. "Oh, leave me, Sir Harry, and tell this gentleman that I grieve I cannot return his affection."

"He is gone, Ida," answered the knight; "but I have promised to write to him. If I merely say that you cannot return his affection, he will ask to be permitted to pursue his suit."

"Oh no, no!" cried Ida, clasping her hands, "he must not—I cannot—tell him—tell him——"

"Tell him what?" asked Sir Harry West, not a little agitated himself. "Shall I tell him that you love another?" he added, in a low and serious voice.

The crimson again rushed into her face, and she paused for a moment, casting down her eyes. Then, raising them suddenly, she exclaimed, in Italian, with all the wild vehemence which, derived from her nation and the climate of her birth, had characterised her demeanour, before she had passed through so many scenes of sad and wearing anxiety,

"Yes, yes!—Tell him I love another!"

"Indeed?" cried Sir Harry West, with a check somewhat pale:—for, strange to say, he could more readily have borne to hear her say that she was ready to give her hand with indifference, than to listen to an acknowledgment that she loved. "Ida must tell me whom it is she loves; and I promise her, that nothing on earth shall be wanting on my part to promote her happiness. Tell me, Ida, tell me," he continued, seeing that she stood silent; "tell me, I adjure you. If you have any consideration, regard, affection for me, keep me not in suspense, but tell me who is this. Nay, Ida, I beseech, I entreat."

Ida gazed at him for a moment, with her trembling lips apart, then cast herself into his arms, and with streaming eyes hid her glowing face upon his shoulder.

"Who?" said the knight.

She answered in a whisper. It was only one word; but Sir Harry West's eyes brightened.

"Indeed, indeed, my Ida!" he cried, still holding her to his heart; "and you willingly sacrifice all the bright and sunny part of life to be an old man's darling?"

"I would rather," answered the girl, looking up, "I would rather be an old man's darling, than a young man's neglected wife. All I ask is, to remain with you for ever; never to quit you; to see you always, hear you always, and to give up my life to him who first protected me, first was kind to me, whom I have ever loved, and ever shall love, better than any one on earth. Call me what you will—your child, your servant, anything!—But send me not from you."

"No, no, Ida," answered Sir Harry West, with a smile lighting up his fine, though somewhat worn, countenance; "you have chosen your part; you have made up your mind. If you stay at all, it is as my wife."

"Oh, with what joy!" she cried. "But I forget.—Am I fit to be your wife? What will your relations, your high friends, say, at your marrying the poor Italian girl?"

"Let them say what they will," replied Sir Harry. "There will be gibes and scoffs enow at the old man marrying a girl young enough to be his daughter—ay, his grand-daughter. They will say he is in his dotage, Ida, and predict all sorts of evil results."

"They will speak false," she cried, vehemently: "and if they did but know all that I owe to you——"

"And all I owe to you, Ida," rejoined the knight, "they might comprehend the feelings that actuate us both. I look to you, dear one, whatever be their prophecies, to give them the lie."

"I will do it," replied Ida Mara; and she kept her word, leaving on record, that, for once, the marriage of a man of more than sixty with a girl of two-and-twenty produced happiness to both.

THE END.

